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"I DID NOT KILL YOUR FATHER. A CURSE UPON YOU."

THE WORKS

OF

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

MARGUERITE DE VALOIS

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INTRODUCTION.

1572–1575.

THE period in French history occupied by the last two kings of the Valois house is treated by Dumas in a series of three "Valois romances" — *Marguerite de Valois*, *La Dame de Monsoreau*, and *The Forty-Five Guardsmen*. With his customary accuracy, Dumas has given us, under the guise of fiction, a wonderfully vivid and absorbing account of a time when not only France but all Europe was in the throes of conflict between Catholics and Protestants. Regarding the character of this period, M. Victor Duruy writes as follows:

"When the French and Spanish kings signed the peace of Château Cambrésis (1559) they purposed to introduce into their government the new spirit which animated the Church, and to wage a pitiless war against heresy. The one undertook to stifle the Reformation in France; the other sought to prevent its birth in Italy and Spain, and to crush it in the Netherlands and England. When Henry II. died, his three sons, the last of the Valois, carried on his plans. At first they required only the advice of Spain. The oldest, Francis II., reigned less than a year and a half (1559–1560). The second, Charles IX., died at the age of twenty-four (1574). The third, Henry III. (1574–1589), who alone attained full manhood, always remained in a sort of minority, whence he emerged only in fits of passion. Hence this Valois line was incapable of conducting in France the great battle of creeds.

"But at their side or confronting them, there were persons more strongly tempered for good or ill. Such were Catherine de Médicis, their mother, unscrupulous and astute; the Guises, uncles of Mary Stuart, queen of Scotland, who organized the Catholics into a party when they saw the Protestants forming

a faction around their rivals, the princes of the house of Bourbon; the general Condé; Coligny, who, from a moral point of view, was the superior of them all; in the Netherlands, William the Silent, the Prince of Orange; in England, Elizabeth, daughter of Henry VIII., who, during the reign of her sister Mary, was the hope of the English Protestants.

"In the war many diverging interests were about to engage. The Dutch desired liberty, England her independence, the cities of France their ancient communal rights, and provincial feudalism its former privileges. But the religious form, which was that of the times, covered all."

The point where Dumas picks up the chronicle in *Marguerite de Valois* is the culmination of religious frenzy that resulted in the massacre of Saint Bartholomew, where the unsuspecting Protestant victims were slain by the thousands. This is one of the darkest blots on the history of France, and one which will forever darken the reign of Charles IX.; yet for the crime he received congratulations from the courts of Rome and Spain. "Be fully assured," wrote Philip II., "that in furthering thus the affairs of God, you are furthering your own still more." The sentence is significant, as revealing the inhuman policy which sought to cloak political treachery with the guise of piety, and which fastened to the hats of cut-throats and murderers the cross of Christ.

Dumas gives prominence to another reason for the massacre — the desire of Catherine de Médicis to make away with Henry of Navarre, whose ascendant Bourbon star threatened to eclipse (as afterwards it did) the house of Valois. Although Catherine had four sons, three of whom successively mounted the throne, none of them left issue in the royal line. Catherine gnashed her teeth as she watched the seemingly careless King of Navarre. He was a Protestant. Under pretext of cementing the two houses, the hand of Catherine's daughter, Marguerite de Valois, was given him in marriage and he was enticed to the Louvre. From the moment he entered Paris his life was in jeopardy. The butchery of St. Bartholomew's day was ordered, but Henry escaped. Catherine then made several secret attempts at his life, substantially as related in *Marguerite de Valois.* The manner in which plot was met with counterplot, on the part of these two crafty minds, is rich in interesting material that Dumas was quick to perceive and to put to the best possible advantage.

An entertaining view is given of Henry of Navarre, who may be considered the hero of all three of the Valois romances. Though playing minor parts in *La Dame de Monsoreau* and *The Forty-Five Guardsmen*, his mocking figure casts many a disquieting shadow across their pages, giving the queen mother dark visions of a mighty Henry IV., who should people the tottering throne of France with a race of real kings. But for the present Henry is content to dally and bide his time, masking his intentions behind a baffling smile. The clearest glimpse of him is given in *Marguerite de Valois*, revealing the adventurer, the gallant, the sardonic philosopher, the man of many minds and any creed, — at the same time the man who never forgets a friend, and who unhesitatingly dares death for the sake of friendship or love. He is shrewd enough to foresee his opportunity, patient enough to await it, and generous enough not to abuse it. We do not wonder, therefore, that we find afterwards, in the annals of France, his name associated with the Edict of Nantes, the first strong blow for civil and religious liberty.

The person of Catherine de Médicis, never lovable, is, perhaps, not treated by Dumas with a severity that history will not justify. Cold, calculating, and treacherous, she stopped at nothing in the pursuit of her plans; nor would she have suffered a qualm from the massacre of St. Bartholomew, if Henry of Navarre and every Protestant in the kingdom had also met their end at that time. Her modes of dispensing death — perfumed gloves, poisoned books, and the like — are vouched for, and the details of Charles IX.'s demise are very credible.

The heroine of the story, Marguerite de Valois, is a worthy daughter of a worthy mother. For this verdict, however, we are indebted to history rather than to Dumas, who is somewhat under the spell of her beautiful exterior. Marguerite's moral obliquity did not take the trend of poisoning, but followed the gentler paths of seduction and illicit love. Historians have commented freely upon the questionable life of this, one of the greatest coquettes in history, and upon the sinister use she made of her beauty. Her *liaison* with La Mole has the one saving clause that she was sincere in her love and exerted every effort to save him.

La Mole and Coconnas played fully as important a part at the court of Charles IX. as is here indicated. La Mole was at one time the confidant of the Duc d'Alençon. The King,

who disliked him, determined to wait personally for him in a hall of the Louvre and strangle him. La Mole's entrance into the Queen of Navarre's room saved him, very nearly as Dumas describes. But history does not give either La Mole or Coconnas so agreeable a character as does Dumas. The La Mole of life was cowardly, dissolute, and vacillating — fit company for D'Alençon; while Coconnas was brave, dissolute, and stubborn. It will be noted that they had at least one trait in common — a trait shared with their mistresses, Marguerite de Valois and the Duchesse de Nevers. That the two women really did secure and embalm the heads of their unfortunate lovers after their execution in the Place de Grève is averred by more than one writer.

The characters of Henri, Duc d'Anjou, afterwards Henri III., and François, Duc d'Alençon, afterwards the Duc d'Anjou, will be considered in the two succeeding volumes. There Dumas treats them more fully. Both stories are concerned with the reign of Henri III., who is mentioned rather than described in the present volume. François' portrait is drawn clearly enough at the outset to indicate the despicable part he plays throughout his career. He is the villain, just as Henry of Navarre is the hero of the Valois romances; and it is his death, narrated in *The Forty-Five Guardsmen*, that paves the way for Henry of Navarre to ascend the throne of France.

J. Walker McSpadden.

CAST OF CHARACTERS.

Barthélemy, De, Huguenot.
Beaulieu, De, Governor of Vincennes.
Besme, De, retainer of the Duc de Guise.
Caboche, Maître, executioner.
Catherine de Médicis, Queen Mother.
Charles IX., King of France.
Coconnas, Marcus Annibal, Comte de, Catholic.
Coligny, Admiral de, Huguenot.
Condé, Prince de, Huguenot.
Cracow, Bishop of, Polish ambassador.
D'Alençon, François, Duc, brother of Charles IX.; afterwards Duc d'Anjou.
D'Anjou, Henri, Duc, brother of Charles IX.; successively King of Poland and Henri III. of France.
Dariole, Mlle., in service of Mme. de Sauve.
Elizabeth, Queen of France.
Gast, Du, Catholic.
Grégoire, servant at "Belle Étoile" inn.
Guise, Henri de Lorraine, Duc de, Catholic.
Henri de Bourbon, King of Navarre.
Laguesle, procureur.
La Hurière, Maître, host of the "Belle Étoile" inn.
La Hurière, Mme., wife of foregoing.
La Mole, Joseph Hyacinthe Boniface de Serac, Comte de, Huguenot.
Lasco, the Palatine, Polish ambassador.
Lorraine, Claude, Duchesse de, sister of Marguerite de Valois.
Madelon, nurse of Charles IX.
Marguerite de Valois, Queen of Navarre.
Matignon, Mlle. Gillonne de, confidante of Marguerite de Valois.

MAUREVEL, FRANÇOIS DE LOUVIERS, the "King's slayer."
MERCANDON, LAMBERT, Huguenot.
MERCANDON, MME., wife of foregoing.
MERCANDON, OLIVIER, son of foregoing.
MOUY DE SAINT PHALE, DE, Huguenot.
MOZILLE, physician.
NANCEY, DE, captain of the Guard.
NEVERS, HENRIETTE, DUCHESSE DE, Catholic.
ORTHON, page to Henri de Navarre.
PARÉ, AMBROISE, physician.
PRESIDENT of the Tribunal.
RENÉ, MAÎTRE, Florentine, perfumer to Queen Mother.
ROBIN, MAÎTRE, valet to Duc de Guise.
SAUCOURT, DE, Huguenot.
SAUVE, BARON DE, Catholic.
SAUVE, MME. CHARLOTTE DE, wife of foregoing.
TÉLIGNY, DE, Huguenot.
TOUCHET, MARIE, mistress of Charles IX.
TOUCHET, CHARLES, son of foregoing; afterwards Duc d'Angoulême.

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MARGUERITE DE VALOIS.

CHAPTER I.

MONSIEUR DE GUISE'S LATIN.

On Monday, the 18th of August, 1572, there was a splendid festival at the Louvre.

The ordinarily gloomy windows of the ancient royal residence were brilliantly lighted, and the squares and streets adjacent, usually so solitary after Saint Germain l'Auxerrois had struck the hour of nine, were crowded with people, although it was past midnight.

The vast, threatening, eager, turbulent throng resembled, in the darkness, a black and tumbling sea, each billow of which makes a roaring breaker; this sea, flowing through the Rue des Fossés Saint Germain and the Rue de l'Astruce and covering the quay, surged against the base of the walls of the Louvre, and, in its refluent tide, against the Hôtel de Bourbon, which faced it on the other side.

In spite of the royal festival, and perhaps even because of the royal festival, there was something threatening in the appearance of the people, for no doubt was felt that this imposing ceremony which called them there as spectators, was only the prelude to another in which they would participate a week later as invited guests and amuse themselves with all their hearts.

The court was celebrating the marriage of Madame Marguerite de Valois, daughter of Henry II. and sister of King Charles IX., with Henry de Bourbon, King of Navarre. In truth, that very morning, on a stage erected at the entrance to Notre-Dame, the Cardinal de Bourbon had united the young couple with the usual ceremonial observed at the marriages of the royal daughters of France.

This marriage had astonished every one, and occasioned much surmise to certain persons who saw clearer than others. They found it difficult to understand the union of two parties who hated each other so thoroughly as did, at this moment, the Protestant party and the Catholic party; and they wondered how the young Prince de Condé could forgive the Duc d'Anjou, the King's brother, for the death of his father, assassinated at Jarnac by Montesquiou. They asked how the young Duc de Guise could pardon Admiral de Coligny for the death of his father, assassinated at Orléans by Poltrot de Méré.

Moreover, Jeanne de Navarre, the weak Antoine de Bourbon's courageous wife, who had conducted her son Henry to the royal marriage awaiting him, had died scarcely two months before, and singular reports had been spread abroad as to her sudden death. It was everywhere whispered, and in some places said aloud, that she had discovered some terrible secret; and that Catharine de Médicis, fearing its disclosure, had poisoned her with perfumed gloves, which had been made by a man named Réné, a Florentine deeply skilled in such matters. This report was the more widely spread and believed when, after this great queen's death, at her son's request, two celebrated physicians, one of whom was the famous Ambroise Paré, were instructed to open and examine the body, but not the skull. As Jeanne de Navarre had been poisoned by a perfume, only the brain could show any trace of the crime (the one part excluded from dissection). We say crime, for no one doubted that a crime had been committed.

This was not all. King Charles in particular had, with a persistency almost approaching obstinacy, urged this marriage, which not only reëstablished peace in his kingdom, but also attracted to Paris the principal Huguenots of France. As the two betrothed belonged one to the Catholic religion and the other to the reformed religion, they had been obliged to obtain a dispensation from Gregory XIII., who then filled the papal chair. The dispensation was slow in coming, and the delay had caused the late Queen of Navarre great uneasiness. She one day expressed to Charles IX. her fears lest the dispensation should not arrive; to which the King replied:

"Have no anxiety, my dear aunt. I honor you more than I do the Pope, and I love my sister more than I fear him. I am not a Huguenot, neither am I a blockhead; and if the Pope makes a fool of himself, I will myself take Margot by

the hand, and have her married to your son in some Protestant meeting-house!"

This speech was soon spread from the Louvre through the city, and, while it greatly rejoiced the Huguenots, had given the Catholics something to think about; they asked one another, in a whisper, if the King was really betraying them or was only playing a comedy which some fine morning or evening might have an unexpected ending.

Charles IX.'s conduct toward Admiral de Coligny, who for five or six years had been so bitterly opposed to the King, appeared particularly inexplicable; after having put on his head a price of a hundred and fifty thousand golden crowns, the King now swore by him, called him his father, and declared openly that he should in future confide the conduct of the war to him alone. To such a pitch was this carried that Catharine de Médicis herself, who until then had controlled the young prince's actions, will, and even desires, seemed to be growing really uneasy, and not without reason; for, in a moment of confidence, Charles IX. had said to the admiral, in reference to the war in Flanders,

"My father, there is one other thing against which we must be on our guard — that is, that the queen, my mother, who likes to poke her nose everywhere, as you well know, shall learn nothing of this undertaking; we must keep it so quiet that she will not have a suspicion of it, or being such a mischief-maker as I know she is, she would spoil all."

Now, wise and experienced as he was, Coligny had not been able to keep such an absolute secret; and, though he had come to Paris with great suspicions, and albeit at his departure from Chatillon a peasant woman had thrown herself at his feet, crying, "Ah! sir, our good master, do not go to Paris, for if you do, you will die — you and all who are with you!" — these suspicions were gradually lulled in his heart, and so it was with Téligny, his son-in-law, to whom the King was especially kind and attentive, calling him his brother, as he called the admiral his father, and addressing him with the familiar "thou," as he did his best friends.

The Huguenots, excepting some few morose and suspicious spirits, were therefore completely reassured. The death of the Queen of Navarre passed as having been caused by pleurisy, and the spacious apartments of the Louvre were filled with all those gallant Protestants to whom the marriage of

their young chief, Henry, promised an unexpected return of good fortune. Admiral Coligny, La Rochefoucault, the young Prince de Condé, Téligny, — in short, all the leaders of the party, — were triumphant when they saw so powerful at the Louvre and so welcome in Paris those whom, three months before, King Charles and Queen Catharine would have hanged on gibbets higher than those of assassins.

The Maréchal de Montmorency was the only one who was missing among all his brothers, for no promise could move him, no specious appearances deceive him, and he remained secluded in his château de l'Isle Adam, offering as his excuse for not appearing the grief which he still felt for his father, the Constable Anne de Montmorency, who had been killed at the battle of Saint Denis by a pistol-shot fired by Robert Stuart. But as this had taken place more than three years before, and as sensitiveness was a virtue little practised at that time, this unduly protracted mourning was interpreted just as people cared to interpret it.

However, everything seemed to show that the Maréchal de Montmorency was mistaken. The King, the Queen, the Duc d'Anjou, and the Duc d'Alençon did the honors of the royal festival with all courtesy and kindness.

The Duc d'Anjou received from the Huguenots themselves well-deserved compliments on the two battles of Jarnac and Montcontour, which he had gained before he was eighteen years of age, more precocious in that than either Cæsar or Alexander, to whom they compared him, of course placing the conquerors of Pharsalia and the Issus as inferior to the living prince. The Duc d'Alençon looked on, with his bland, false smile, while Queen Catharine, radiant with joy and overflowing with honeyed phrases, congratulated Prince Henry de Condé on his recent marriage with Marie de Clèves; even the Messieurs de Guise themselves smiled on the formidable enemies of their house, and the Duc de Mayenne discoursed with M. de Tavannes and the admiral on the impending war, which was now more than ever threatened against Philippe II.

In the midst of these groups a young man of about nineteen years of age was walking to and fro, his head a little on one side, his ear open to all that was said. He had a keen eye, black hair cut very close, thick eyebrows, a nose hooked like an eagle's, a sneering smile, and a growing mustache and beard. This young man, who by his reckless daring had first

attracted attention at the battle of Arnay-le-Duc and was the recipient of numberless compliments, was the dearly beloved pupil of Coligny and the hero of the day. Three months before — that is to say, when his mother was still living — he was called the Prince de Béarn, now he was called the King of Navarre, afterwards he was known as Henry IV.

From time to time a swift and gloomy cloud passed over his brow; unquestionably it was at the thought that scarce had two months elapsed since his mother's death, and he, less than any one, doubted that she had been poisoned. But the cloud was transitory, and disappeared like a fleeting shadow, for they who spoke to him, they who congratulated him, they who elbowed him, were the very ones who had assassinated the brave Jeanne d'Albret.

Some paces distant from the King of Navarre, almost as pensive, almost as gloomy as the king pretended to be joyous and open-hearted, was the young Duc de Guise, conversing with Téligny. More fortunate than the Béarnais, at two-and-twenty he had almost attained the reputation of his father, François, the great Duc de Guise. He was an elegant gentleman, very tall, with a noble and haughty look, and gifted with that natural majesty which caused it to be said that in comparison with him other princes seemed to belong to the people. Young as he was, the Catholics looked up to him as the chief of their party, as the Huguenots saw theirs in Henry of Navarre, whose portrait we have just drawn. At first he had borne the title of Prince de Joinville, and at the siege of Orléans had fought his first battle under his father, who died in his arms, denouncing Admiral Coligny as his assassin. The young duke then, like Hannibal, took a solemn oath to avenge his father's death on the admiral and his family, and to pursue the foes to his religion without truce or respite, promising God to be his destroying angel on earth until the last heretic should be exterminated. So with deep astonishment the people saw this prince, usually so faithful to his word, offering his hand to those whom he had sworn to hold as his eternal enemies, and talking familiarly with the son-in-law of the man whose death he had promised to his dying father.

But as we have said, this was an evening of astonishments.

Indeed, an observer privileged to be present at this festival, endowed with the knowledge of the future which is fortu-

nately hidden from men, and with that power of reading men's hearts which unfortunately belongs only to God, would have certainly enjoyed the strangest spectacle to be found in all the annals of the melancholy human comedy.

But this observer who was absent from the inner courts of the Louvre was to be found in the streets gazing with flashing eyes and breaking out into loud threats; this observer was the people, who, with its marvellous instinct made keener by hatred, watched from afar the shadows of its implacable enemies and translated the impressions they made with as great clearness as an inquisitive person can do before the windows of a hermetically sealed ball-room. The music intoxicates and governs the dancers, but the inquisitive person sees only the movement and laughs at the puppet jumping about without reason, because the inquisitive person hears no music.

The music that intoxicated the Huguenots was the voice of their pride.

The gleams which caught the eyes of the Parisians that midnight were the lightning flashes of their hatred illuminating the future.

And meantime everything was still festive within, and a murmur softer and more flattering than ever was at this moment pervading the Louvre, for the youthful bride, having laid aside her toilet of ceremony, her long mantle and flowing veil, had just returned to the ball-room, accompanied by the lovely Duchesse de Nevers, her most intimate friend, and led by her brother, Charles IX., who presented her to the principal guests.

The bride was the daughter of Henry II., was the pearl of the crown of France, was MARGUERITE DE VALOIS, whom in his familiar tenderness for her King Charles IX. always called "*ma sœur Margot*," "my sister Margot."

Assuredly never was any welcome, however flattering, more richly deserved than that which the new Queen of Navarre was at this moment receiving. Marguerite at this period was scarcely twenty, and she was already the object of all the poets' eulogies, some of whom compared her to Aurora, others to Cytherea; she was, in truth, a beauty without rival in that court in which Catharine de Médicis had assembled the loveliest women she could find, to make of them her sirens.

Marguerite had black hair and a brilliant complexion; a voluptuous eye, veiled by long lashes; delicate coral lips; a

slender neck; a graceful, opulent figure, and concealed in a satin slipper a tiny foot. The French, who possessed her, were proud to see such a lovely flower flourishing in their soil, and foreigners who passed through France returned home dazzled with her beauty if they had but seen her, and amazed at her knowledge if they had discoursed with her; for Marguerite was not only the loveliest, she was also the most erudite woman of her time, and every one was quoting the remark of an Italian scholar who had been presented to her, and who, after having conversed with her for an hour in Italian, Spanish, Latin, and Greek, had gone away saying:

"To see the court without seeing Marguerite de Valois is to see neither France nor the court."

Thus addresses to King Charles IX. and the Queen of Navarre were not wanting. It is well known that the Huguenots were great hands at addresses. Many allusions to the past, many hints as to the future, were adroitly slipped into these harangues; but to all such allusions and speeches the King replied, with his pale lips and artificial smiles:

"In giving my sister Margot to Henry of Navarre, I give my sister to all the Protestants of the kingdom."

This phrase assured some and made others smile, for it had really a double sense: the one paternal, with which Charles IX. would not load his mind; the other insulting to the bride, to her husband, and also to him who said it, for it recalled some scandalous rumors with which the chroniclers of the court had already found means to smirch the nuptial robe of Marguerite de Valois.

However, M. de Guise was conversing, as we have said, with Téligny; but he did not pay to the conversation such sustained attention but that he turned away somewhat, from time to time, to cast a glance at the group of ladies, in the centre of whom glittered the Queen of Navarre. When the princess's eye thus met that of the young duke, a cloud seemed to overspread that lovely brow, around which stars of diamonds formed a tremulous halo, and some agitating thought might be divined in her restless and impatient manner.

The Princess Claude, Marguerite's eldest sister, who had been for some years married to the Duc de Lorraine, had observed this uneasiness, and was going up to her to inquire the cause, when all stood aside at the approach of the queen mother, who came forward, leaning on the arm of the young

Prince de Condé, and the princess was thus suddenly separated from her sister. There was a general movement, by which the Duc de Guise profited to approach Madame de Nevers, his sister-in-law, and Marguerite.

Madame de Lorraine, who had not lost sight of her sister, then remarked, instead of the cloud which she had before observed on her forehead, a burning blush come into her cheeks. The duke approached still nearer, and when he was within two steps of Marguerite, she appeared rather to feel than see his presence, and turned round, making a violent effort over herself in order to give her features an appearance of calmness and indifference. The duke, then respectfully bowing, murmured in a low tone,

"*Ipse attuli.*"

That meant: "I have brought it, or brought it myself."

Marguerite returned the young duke's bow, and as she straightened herself, replied, in the same tone,

"*Noctu pro more.*"

That meant: "To-night, as usual."

These soft words, absorbed by the enormous collar which the princess wore, as in the bell of a speaking-trumpet, were heard only by the person to whom they were addressed; but brief as had been the conference, it doubtless composed all the young couple had to say, for after this exchange of two words for three, they separated, Marguerite more thoughtful and the duke with his brow less clouded than when they met. This little scene took place without the person most interested appearing to remark it, for the King of Navarre had eyes but for one lady, and she had around her a suite almost as numerous as that which followed Marguerite de Valois. This was the beautiful Madame de Sauve.

Charlotte de Beaune Semblançay, granddaughter of the unfortunate Semblançay, and wife of Simon de Fizes, Baron de Sauve, was one of the ladies-in-waiting to Catharine de Médicis, and one of the most redoubtable auxiliaries of this queen, who poured forth to her enemies love-philtres when she dared not pour out Florentine poison. Delicately fair, and by turns sparkling with vivacity or languishing in melancholy, always ready for love and intrigue, the two great occupations which for fifty years employed the court of the three succeeding kings, — a woman in every acceptation of the word and in all the charm of the idea, from the blue eye

languishing or flashing with fire to the small rebellious feet arched in their velvet slippers, Madame de Sauve had already for some months taken complete possession of every faculty of the King of Navarre, then beginning his career as a lover as well as a politician; thus it was that Marguerite de Valois, a magnificent and royal beauty, had not even excited admiration in her husband's heart; and what was more strange, and astonished all the world, even from a soul so full of darkness and mystery, Catharine de Médicis, while she prosecuted her project of union between her daughter and the King of Navarre, had not ceased to favor almost openly his amour with Madame de Sauve. But despite this powerful aid, and despite the easy manners of the age, the lovely Charlotte had hitherto resisted; and this resistance, unheard of, incredible, unprecedented, even more than the beauty and wit of her who resisted, had excited in the heart of the Béarnais a passion which, unable to satisfy itself, had destroyed in the young king's heart all timidity, pride, and even that carelessness, half philosophic, half indolent, which formed the basis of his character.

Madame de Sauve had been only a few minutes in the ballroom; from spite or grief she had at first resolved on not being present at her rival's triumph, and under the pretext of an indisposition had allowed her husband, who had been for five years secretary of state, to go alone to the Louvre; but when Catharine de Médicis saw the baron without his wife, she asked the cause that kept her dear Charlotte away, and when she found that the indisposition was but slight, she wrote a few words to her, which the lady hastened to obey. Henry, sad as he had at first been at her absence, had yet breathed more freely when he saw M. de Sauve enter alone; but just as he was about to pay some court to the charming creature whom he was condemned, if not to love, at least to treat as his wife, he unexpectedly saw Madame de Sauve arise from the farther end of the gallery. He remained stationary on the spot, his eyes fastened on the Circe who enthralled him as if by magic chains, and instead of proceeding towards his wife, by a movement of hesitation which betrayed more astonishment than alarm he advanced to meet Madame de Sauve.

The courtiers, seeing the King of Navarre, whose inflammable heart they knew, approach the beautiful Charlotte, had not the courage to prevent their meeting, but drew aside com-

plaisantly; so that at the very moment when Marguerite de Valois and Monsieur de Guise exchanged the few words in Latin which we have noted above, Henry, having approached Madame de Sauve, began, in very intelligible French, although with somewhat of a Gascon accent, a conversation by no means so mysterious.

"Ah, *ma mie!*" he said, "you have, then, come at the very moment when they assured me that you were ill, and I had lost all hope of seeing you."

"Would your majesty perhaps wish me to believe that it had cost you something to lose this hope?" replied Madame de Sauve.

"By Heaven! I believe it!" replied the Béarnais; "know you not that you are my sun by day and my star by night? By my faith, I was in deepest darkness till you appeared and suddenly illumined all."

"Then, monseigneur, I serve you a very ill turn."

"What do you mean, *ma mie?*" inquired Henry.

"I mean that he who is master of the handsomest woman in France should only have one desire — that the light should disappear and give way to darkness, for happiness awaits you in the darkness."

"You know, cruel one, that my happiness is in the hands of one woman only, and that she laughs at poor Henry."

"Oh!" replied the baroness, "I believed, on the contrary, that it was this person who was the sport and jest of the King of Navarre." Henry was alarmed at this hostile attitude, and yet he bethought him that it betrayed jealous spite, and that jealous spite is only the mask of love.

"Indeed, dear Charlotte, you reproach me very unjustly, and I do not comprehend how so lovely a mouth can be so cruel. Do you suppose for a moment that it is I who give myself in marriage? No, *ventre saint gris*, it is not I!"

"It is I, perhaps," said the baroness, sharply, — if ever the voice of the woman who loves us and reproaches us for not loving her can seem sharp.

"With your lovely eyes have you not seen farther, baroness? No, no; Henry of Navarre is not marrying Marguerite de Valois."

"And who, pray, is?"

"Why, by Heaven! it is the reformed religion marrying the pope — that's all."

"No, no, I cannot be deceived by your jests. Monseigneur loves Madame Marguerite. And can I blame you? Heaven forbid! She is beautiful enough to be adored."

Henry reflected for a moment, and, as he reflected, a meaning smile curled the corner of his lips.

"Baroness," said he, "you seem to be seeking a quarrel with me, but you have no right to do so. What have you done to prevent me from marrying Madame Marguerite? Nothing. On the contrary, you have always driven me to despair."

"And well for me that I have, monseigneur," replied Madame de Sauve.

"How so?"

"Why, of course, because you are marrying another woman!"

"I marry her because you love me not."

"If I had loved you, sire, I must have died in an hour."

"In an hour? What do you mean? And of what death would you have died?"

"Of jealousy! — for in an hour the Queen of Navarre will send away her women, and your majesty your gentlemen."

"Is that really the thought that is uppermost in your mind, *ma mie?*"

"I did not say so. I only say, that if I loved you it would be uppermost in my mind most tormentingly."

"Very well," said Henry, at the height of joy on hearing this confession, the first which she had made to him, "suppose the King of Navarre should not send away his gentlemen this evening?"

"Sire," replied Madame de Sauve, looking at the king with astonishment for once unfeigned, "you say things impossible and incredible."

"What must I do to make you believe them?"

"Give me a proof — and that proof you cannot give me."

"Yes, baroness, yes! By Saint Henry, I will give it you!" exclaimed the king, gazing at the young woman with eyes hot with love.

"Oh, your majesty!" exclaimed the lovely Charlotte in an undertone and with downcast eyes, "I do not understand — No! no, it is impossible for you to turn your back on the happiness awaiting you."

"There are four Henrys in this room, my adorable!"

replied the king, "Henry de France, Henry de Condé, Henry de Guise, but there is only one Henry of Navarre."

"Well?"

"Well; if this Henry of Navarre is with you all night" —

"All night!"

"Yes; will that be a certain proof to you that he is not with any other?"

"Ah! if you do that, sire," cried Madame Sauve.

"On the honor of a gentleman I will do it!"

Madame de Sauve raised her great eyes dewy with voluptuous promises and looked at the king, whose heart was filled with an intoxicating joy.

"And then," said Henry, "what will you say?"

"I will say," replied Charlotte, "that your majesty really loves me."

"*Ventre saint gris!* then you shall say it, baroness, for it is true."

"But how can you manage it?" murmured Madame de Sauve.

"Oh! by Heaven! baroness, have you not about you some waiting-woman, some girl whom you can trust?"

"Yes, Dariole is so devoted to me that she would let herself be cut in pieces for me; she is a real treasure."

"By Heaven! then say to her that I will make her fortune when I am King of France, as the astrologers prophesy."

Charlotte smiled, for even at this period the Gascon reputation of the Béarnais was already established with respect to his promises.

"Well, then, what do you want Dariole to do?"

"Little for her, a great deal for me. Your apartment is over mine?"

"Yes."

"Let her wait behind the door. I will knock gently three times; she will open the door, and you will have the proof that I have promised you."

Madame de Sauve kept silence for several seconds, and then, as if she had looked around her to observe if she were overheard, she fastened her gaze for a moment on the group clustering around the queen mother; brief as the moment was, it was sufficient for Catharine and her lady-in-waiting to exchange a look.

"Oh, if I were inclined," said Madame de Suave, with a

siren's accent that would have melted the wax in Ulysses' ears, "if I were inclined to make your majesty tell a falsehood" —

"*Ma mie*, try" —

"Ah, *ma foi!* I confess I am tempted to do so."

"Give in! Women are never so strong as after they are defeated."

"Sire, I hold you to your promise for Dariole when you shall be King of France."

Henry uttered an exclamation of joy.

At the precise moment when this cry escaped the lips of the Béarnais, the Queen of Navarre was replying to the Duc de Guise:

"*Noctu pro more* — to-night as usual."

Then Henry turned away from Madame de Suave as happy as the Duc de Guise had been when he left Marguerite de Valois.

An hour after the double scene we have just related, King Charles and the queen mother retired to their apartments. Almost immediately the rooms began to empty; the galleries exhibited the bases of their marble columns. The admiral and the Prince de Condé were escorted home by four hundred Huguenot gentlemen through the middle of the crowd, which hooted as they passed. Then Henry de Guise, with the Lorraine gentlemen and the Catholics, left in their turn, greeted by cries of joy and plaudits of the people.

But Marguerite de Valois, Henry de Navarre, and Madame de Sauve lived in the Louvre.

CHAPTER II.

THE QUEEN OF NAVARRE'S BEDCHAMBER.

THE Duc de Guise escorted his sister-in-law, the Duchess de Nevers, to her hôtel in the Rue du Chaume, facing the Rue de Brac, and after he had put her into the hands of her women, he went to his own apartment to change his dress, put on a night cloak, and armed himself with one of those short, keen poniards which are called "*foi de gentilhomme*," and were worn without swords; but as he took it off the table on which it lay, he perceived a small billet between the blade and the scabbard.

He opened it, and read as follows:

"I hope M. de Guise will not return to the Louvre to-night; or if he does, that he will at least take the precaution to arm himself with a good coat of mail and a proved sword."

"Aha!" said the duke, addressing his valet, "this is a singular warning, Maître Robin. Now be kind enough to tell me who has been here during my absence."

"Only one person, monseigneur."

"Who?"

"Monsieur du Gast."

"Aha! In fact, methinks I recognize the handwriting. And you are sure that Du Gast came? You saw him?"

"More than that, monseigneur; I spoke with him."

"Very good; then I will follow his advice — my steel jacket and my sword."

The valet, accustomed to these changes of costume, brought both. The duke put on his jacket, which was made of rings of steel so fine that it was scarcely thicker than velvet; he then drew on over his coat of mail his small clothes and a doublet of gray and silver, his favorite colors, put on a pair of long boots which reached to the middle of his thighs, covered his head with a velvet toque unadorned with feathers or precious stones, threw over his shoulders a dark-colored cloak, hung a dagger by his side, handed his sword to a page, the only attendant he allowed to accompany him, and took the way to the Louvre.

As he went down the steps of the hôtel, the watchman of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois had just announced one o'clock in the morning.

Though the night was far gone and the streets at this time were very far from safe, no accident befell the adventurous prince on the way, and safe and sound he approached the colossal mass of the ancient Louvre, all the lights of which had been extinguished one after the other, so that it rose portentous in its silence and darkness.

In front of the royal château was a deep fosse, looking into which were the chambers of most of the princes who inhabited the palace. Marguerite's apartment was on the first floor. But this first floor, easily accessible but for the fosse, was, in consequence of the depth to which that was cut, thirty feet from the bottom of the wall, and consequently out of the reach of robbers or lovers; nevertheless the Duc de Guise approached it without hesitation.

At the same moment was heard the noise of a window which opened on the ground floor. This window was grated, but a hand appeared, lifted out one of the bars which had been loosened, and dropped from it a silken lace.

"Is that you, Gillonne?" said the duke, in a low voice.

"Yes, monseigneur," replied a woman's voice, in a still lower tone.

"And Marguerite?"

"Is waiting for you."

"'T is well."

Hereupon the duke made a signal to his page, who, opening his cloak, took out a small rope ladder. The prince fastened one end to the silk lace, and Gillonne, drawing it up, tied it securely. Then the prince, after having buckled his sword to his belt, ascended without accident. When he had entered, the bar was replaced and the window closed, while the page, having seen his master quietly enter the Louvre, to the windows of which he had accompanied him twenty times in the same way, laid himself down in his cloak on the grass of the fosse, beneath the shadow of the wall.

The night was extremely dark, and large drops of warm rain were falling from the heavy clouds charged with electric fluid.

The Duc de Guise followed his guide, who was no other than the daughter of Jacques de Matignon, maréchal of France. She was the especial confidante of Marguerite, who kept no secret from her; and it was said that among the number of mysteries entrusted to her incorruptible fidelity, there were some so terrible as to compel her to keep the rest.

There was no light left either in the low rooms or in the corridors, only from time to time a livid glare illuminated the dark apartments with a vivid flash, which as instantly disappeared.

The duke, still guided by his conductress, who held his hand, reached a staircase built in the thick wall, and opening by a secret and invisible door into the antechamber of Marguerite's apartment.

In this antechamber, which like all the other lower rooms was perfectly dark, Gillonne stopped.

"Have you brought what the queen requested?" she inquired, in a low voice.

"Yes," replied the Duc de Guise; "but I will give it only to her majesty in person."

"Come, then, and do not lose an instant!" said a voice from the darkness, which made the duke start, for he recognized it as Marguerite's.

At the same moment a curtain of violet velvet covered with golden fleurs-de-lis was raised, and the duke made out the form of the queen, who in her impatience had come to meet him.

"I am here, madame," he then said; and he passed the curtain, which fell behind him. So Marguerite de Valois herself now became the prince's guide, leading him into the room which, however, he knew already, while Gillonne, standing at the door, had raised her finger to her lips and reassured her royal mistress.

As if she understood the duke's jealous apprehensions, Marguerite led him to the bedchamber, and there paused.

"Well," she said, "are you satisfied, duke?"

"Satisfied, madame?" was the reply, "and with what?"

"Of the proof I give you," retorted Marguerite, with a slight tone of vexation in her voice, "that I belong to a man who, on the very night of his marriage, makes me of such small importance that he does not even come to thank me for the honor I have done him, not in selecting, but in accepting him for my husband."

"Oh! madame," said the duke, sorrowfully, "be assured he will come if you desire it."

"And do you say that, Henry?" cried Marguerite; "you, who better than any know the contrary of what you say? If I had that desire, should I have asked you to come to the Louvre?"

"You have asked me to come to the Louvre, Marguerite, because you are anxious to destroy every vestige of our past, and because that past lives not only in my memory, but in this silver casket which I bring to you.

"Henry, shall I say one thing to you?" replied Marguerite, gazing earnestly at the duke; "it is that you are more like a schoolboy than a prince. I deny that I have loved you! I desire to quench a flame which will die, perhaps, but the reflection of which will never die! For the loves of persons of my rank illumine and frequently devour the whole epoch contemporary with them. No, no, duke; you may keep the letters of your Marguerite, and the casket she has given you. She asks but one of these letters, and that only because it is as dangerous for you as for herself."

"It is all yours," said the duke. "Take the one that you wish to destroy."

Marguerite searched anxiously in the open casket, and with a tremulous hand took, one after the other, a dozen letters, only the addresses of which she examined, as if by merely glancing at these she could recall to her memory what the letters themselves contained; but after a close scrutiny she looked at the duke, pale and agitated.

"Sir," she said, "what I seek is not here. Can you have lost it, by any accident? for if it should fall into the hands of" —

"What letter do you seek, madame?"

"That in which I told you to marry without delay."

"As an excuse for your infidelity?"

Marguerite shrugged her shoulders.

"No; but to save your life. The one in which I told you that the king, seeing our love and my exertions to break off your proposed marriage with the Infanta of Portugal, had sent for his brother, the Bastard of Angoulême, and said to him, pointing to two swords, '*With this slay Henry de Guise this night, or with the other I will slay thee in the morning.*' Where is that letter?"

"Here," said the duke, drawing it from his breast.

Marguerite almost snatched it from his hands, opened it anxiously, assured herself that it was really the one she desired, uttered an exclamation of joy, and applying the lighted candle to it, the flames instantly consumed the paper; then, as if Marguerite feared that her imprudent words might be read in the very ashes, she trampled them under foot.

During all this the Duc de Guise had watched his mistress attentively.

"Well, Marguerite," he said, when she had finished, "are you satisfied now?"

"Yes, for now that you have wedded the Princesse de Porcian, my brother will forgive me your love; while he would never have pardoned me for revealing a secret such as that which in my weakness for you I had not the strength to conceal from you."

"True," replied De Guise, "then you loved me."

"And I love you still, Henry, as much — more than ever!"

"You" —

"I do; for never more than at this moment did I need a

sincere and devoted friend. Queen, I have no throne: wife, I have no husband!"

The young prince shook his head sorrowfully.

"I tell you, I repeat to you, Henry, that my husband not only does not love me, but hates — despises me; besides, methinks, your presence in the chamber in which he ought to be is proof enough of this hatred, this contempt."

"It is not yet late, madame, and the King of Navarre requires time to dismiss his gentlemen; and if he has not already come, it will not be long before he is here."

"And I tell you," cried Marguerite, with increasing vexation, "I tell you that he will not come!"

"Madame!" exclaimed Gillonne, opening the door and raising the portière, "the King of Navarre is just leaving his apartment!"

"Oh, I knew he would come!" exclaimed the Duc de Guise.

"Henry," said Marguerite, in a quick tone, and seizing the duke's hand, "Henry, you shall see if I am a woman of my word, and if what I have once promised may be relied on. Henry, enter that closet."

"Madame, allow me to go while there is still time, for reflect that the first mark of love he bestows on you, I shall leave the cabinet, and then woe to him!"

"You are mad! go in — go in, I say, and I will be responsible for all."

And she pushed the duke into the closet.

It was time. The door was scarcely closed behind the prince when the King of Navarre, escorted by two pages, who carried eight flambeaux of yellow wax in two candelabra, appeared, smiling, on the threshold of the chamber.

Marguerite concealed her nervousness by making a very low courtesy.

"You are not yet in bed, madame," observed the Béarnais, with his frank and joyous look. "Were you by chance waiting for me?"

"No, sire," replied Marguerite; "for yesterday you repeated to me that you understood our marriage was a political alliance, and that you would never thwart my wishes."

"Assuredly; but that is no reason why we should not confer a little together. Gillonne, close the door and leave us."

Marguerite, who was sitting, then rose and extended her hand, as if to desire the pages to remain.

"Must I call your women?" inquired the king. "I will do so, if such be your desire, although I confess that what I have to say to you would make me prefer our being alone."

And the King of Navarre advanced toward the closet.

"No!" exclaimed Marguerite, hastily going before him; "no — there is no occasion for that; I am ready to hear you."

The Béarnais had learned what he desired to know — he threw a rapid and penetrating glance toward the cabinet, as if, in spite of the portière which hung before it, he would force his way into its darkest depths, and then, turning his looks to his lovely wife, pale with terror, he said with the utmost composure:

"In that case, madame, let us confer for a few moments."

"As your majesty pleases," said the lady, falling into, rather than sitting upon, the seat which her husband pointed out to her.

The Béarnais placed himself beside her.

"Madame," he continued, "whatever many persons may have said, I think our marriage is a good marriage. I stand well with you — you stand well with me."

"But" — said Marguerite, alarmed.

"Consequently," observed the King of Navarre, seeming not to notice Marguerite's hesitancy, "we ought to treat each other like good allies, since we were to-day allied in the presence of God. Don't you think so?"

"Unquestionably, sire."

"I know, madame, how great your penetration is; I know how the ground at court is intersected with dangerous abysses. Now I am young, and although I never injured any one, I have a great many enemies. In which camp, madame, ought I to range her who bears my name, and who has vowed her affection to me at the foot of the altar?"

"Sire, could you think" —

"I think nothing, madame; I hope, and I am anxious to know that my hope is well founded. It is certain that our marriage is merely a pretext or a snare."

Marguerite started, for perchance the same thought had occurred to her own mind.

"Now, then, which of the two?" continued Henry of Navarre. "The King hates me, the Duc d'Anjou hates me, the Duc d'Alençon hates me, Catharine de Médicis hated my mother too much not to hate me."

"Oh, sire, what are you saying?"

"The truth, madame," replied the king; "and in order that it may not be supposed that I am deceived as to Monsieur de Mouy's assassination and the poisoning of my mother, I wish that some one were here who could hear me."

"Oh, sire," replied Marguerite, with an air as calm and smiling as she could assume, "you know very well that there is no person here but you and myself."

"It is for that very reason that I thus give vent to my thoughts; this it is that emboldens me to declare that I am not deceived by the caresses showered on me by the House of France or the House of Lorraine."

"Sire, sire!" exclaimed Marguerite.

"Well, what is it, *ma mie?*" inquired Henry, smiling in his turn.

"Why, sire, such remarks are very dangerous."

"Not when we are alone," observed the king. "I was saying"—

Marguerite was evidently distressed; she desired to stop every word the king uttered, but he continued, with his apparent good nature:

"I was telling you that I was threatened on all sides: threatened by the King, threatened by the Duc d'Alençon, threatened by the Duc d'Anjou, threatened by the queen mother, threatened by the Duc de Guise, by the Duc de Mayenne, by the Cardinal de Lorraine — threatened, in fact, by every one. One feels that instinctively, as you know, madame. Well, against all these threats, which must soon become attacks, I can defend myself by your aid, for you are beloved by all the persons who detest me."

"I?" said Marguerite.

"Yes, you," replied Henry, with the utmost ease of manner; "yes, you are beloved by King Charles, you are beloved" (he laid strong emphasis on the word) "by the Duc d'Alençon, you are beloved by Queen Catharine, and you are beloved by the Duc de Guise."

"Sire!" murmured Marguerite.

"Yes; and what is there astonishing in the fact that every one loves you? All I have mentioned are your brothers or relatives. To love one's brothers and relatives is to live according to God's heart."

"But what, then," asked Marguerite, greatly overcome, "what do you mean?"

"What I have just said, that if you will be — I do not mean my love — but my ally, I can brave everything; while, on the other hand, if you become my enemy, I am lost."

"Oh, your enemy! — never, sir!" exclaimed Marguerite.

"And my love — never either?"

"Perhaps" —

"And my ally?"

"Most decidedly."

And Marguerite turned round and offered her hand to the king.

Henry took it, kissed it gallantly, and retaining it in his own, more from a desire of investigation than from any sentiment of tenderness, said:

"Very well, I believe you, madame, and accept the alliance. They married us without our knowing each other — without our loving each other; they married us without consulting us — us whom they united. We therefore owe nothing to each other as man and wife; you see that I even go beyond your wishes and confirm this evening what I said to you yesterday; but we ally ourselves freely and without any compulsion. We ally ourselves, as two loyal hearts who owe each other mutual protection should ally themselves; 't is as such you understand it?"

"Yes, sir," said Marguerite, endeavoring to withdraw her hand.

"Well, then," continued the Béarnais, with his eyes fastened on the door of the cabinet, "as the first proof of a frank alliance is the most perfect confidence, I will now relate to you, madame, in all its details, the plan I have formed in order that we may victoriously meet and overcome all these enmities."

"Sire" — said Marguerite, in spite of herself turning her eyes toward the closet, whilst the Béarnais, seeing his trick succeed, laughed in his sleeve.

"This is what I mean to do," he continued, without appearing to remark his young wife's nervousness, "I intend" —

"Sire," said Marguerite, rising hastily, and seizing the king's arm, "allow me a little breath; my emotion — the heat — overpowers me."

And, in truth, Marguerite was as pale and trembling as if she was about to fall on the carpet.

Henry went straight to a window some distance off, and opened it. This window looked out on the river.

Marguerite followed him.

"Silence, sire, — silence, for your own sake!" she murmured.

"What, madame," said the Béarnais, with his peculiar smile, "did you not tell me we were alone?"

"Yes, sire; but did you not hear me say that by the aid of a tube introduced into the ceiling or the wall everything could be heard?"

"Well, madame, well," said the Béarnais, earnestly and in a low voice, "it is true you do not love me, but you are, at least, honorable."

"What do you mean, sire?"

"I mean that if you were capable of betraying me, you would have allowed me to go on, as I was betraying myself. You stopped me — I now know that some one is concealed here — that you are an unfaithful wife, but a faithful ally; and just now, I confess, I have more need of fidelity in politics than in love."

"Sire!" replied Marguerite, confused.

"Good, good; we will talk of this hereafter," said Henry, "when we know each other better."

Then, raising his voice — "Well," he continued, "do you breathe more freely now, madame?"

"Yes, sire, — yes!"

"Well, then," said the Béarnais, "I will no longer intrude on you. I owed you my respects, and some advances toward better acquaintance; deign, then, to accept them, as they are offered, with all my heart. Good-night, and happy slumbers!"

Marguerite raised her eyes, shining with gratitude, and offered her husband her hand.

"It is agreed," she said.

"Political alliance, frank and loyal?" asked Henry.

"Frank and loyal," was the reply.

And the Béarnais went toward the door, followed by Marguerite's look as if she were fascinated. Then, when the curtain had fallen between them and the bedchamber:

"Thanks, Marguerite," he said, in a quick low tone, "thanks! You are a true daughter of France. I leave you quite tranquil: lacking your love, your friendship will not fail me. I rely on you, as you, on your side, may rely on me. Adieu, madame."

And Henry kissed his wife's hand, and pressed it gently.

Then with a quick step he returned to his own apartment, saying to himself, in a low voice, in the corridor:

"Who the devil is with her? Is it the King, or the Duc d'Anjou, or the Duc d'Alençon, or the Duc de Guise? is it a brother or a lover? is it both? I' faith, I am almost sorry now I asked the baroness for this rendezvous; but, as my word is pledged, and Dariole is waiting for me — no matter. Yet, *ventre saint gris!* this Margot, as my brother-in-law, King Charles, calls her, is an adorable creature."

And with a step which betrayed a slight hesitation, Henry of Navarre ascended the staircase which led to Madame de Sauve's apartments.

Marguerite had followed him with her eyes until he disappeared. Then she returned to her chamber, and found the duke at the door of the cabinet. The sight of him almost touched her with remorse.

The duke was grave, and his knitted brow bespoke bitter reflection.

"Marguerite is neutral to-day," he said; "in a week Marguerite will be hostile."

"Ah! you have been listening?" said Marguerite.

"What else could I do in the cabinet?"

"And did you find that I behaved otherwise than the Queen of Navarre should behave?"

"No; but differently from the way in which the mistress of the Duc de Guise should behave."

"Sir," replied the queen, "I may not love my husband, but no one has the right to require me to betray him. Tell me honestly: would you reveal the secrets of the Princesse de Porcian, your wife?"

"Come, come, madame," answered the duke, shaking his head, "this is very well; I see that you do not love me as in those days when you disclosed to me the plot of the King against me and my party."

"The King was strong and you were weak; Henry is weak and you are strong. You see I always play a consistent part."

"Only you pass from one camp to another."

"That was a right I acquired, sir, in saving your life."

"Good, madame; and as when lovers separate, they return all the gifts that have passed between them, I will save your life, in my turn, if ever the need arises, and we shall be quits."

And the duke bowed and left the room, nor did Marguerite attempt to retain him.

In the antechamber he found Gillonne, who guided him to the window on the ground floor, and in the fosse he found his page, with whom he returned to the Hôtel de Guise.

Marguerite, in a dreamy mood, went to the opened window.

"What a marriage night!" she murmured to herself; "the husband flees from me — the lover forsakes me!"

At that moment, coming from the Tour de Bois, and going up toward the Moulin de la Monnaie, on the other side of the fosse passed a student, his hand on his hip, and singing:

"SONG.

"Tell me why, O maiden fair,
When I burn to bite thy hair,
And to kiss thy rosy lips,
And to touch thy lovely breast,
Like a nun thou feign'st thee blest
In the cloister's sad eclipse?

"Who will win the precious prize
Of thy brow, thy mouth, thine eyes —
Of thy bosom sweet — what lover?
Wilt thou all thy charms devote
To grim Pluton when the boat
Charon rows shall take thee over?

"After thou hast sailed across,
Loveliest, thou wilt find but loss —
All thy beauty will decay.
When I die and meet thee there
In the shades I'll never swear
Thou wert once my mistress gay!

"Therefore, darling, while we live,
Change thy mind and tokens give —
Kisses from thy honey mouth!
Else when thou art like to die
Thou'lt repent thy cruelty,
Filling all my life with drouth!"

Marguerite listened with a melancholy smile; then when the student's voice was lost in the distance, she shut the window, and called Gillonne to help her to prepare for bed.

CHAPTER III.

THE POET-KING.

The next day and those that followed were devoted to festivals, balls, and tournaments.

The same amalgamation continued to take place between the two parties. The caresses and compliments lavished were enough to turn the heads of the most bigoted Huguenots. Pere Cotton was to be seen dining and carousing with the Baron de Courtaumer; the Duc de Guise went boating on the Seine with the Prince de Condé. King Charles seemed to have laid aside his usual melancholy, and could not get enough of the society of his new brother-in-law, Henry. Moreover, the queen mother was so gay, and so occupied with embroidery, ornaments, and plumes, that she could not sleep.

The Huguenots, to some degree contaminated by this new Capua, began to assume silken pourpoints, wear devices, and parade before certain balconies, as if they were Catholics.

On every side there was such a reaction in favor of the Protestants that it seemed as if the whole court was about to become Protestant; even the admiral, in spite of his experience, was deceived, and was so carried away that one evening he forgot for two whole hours to chew on his toothpick, which he always used from two o'clock, at which time he finished his dinner, until eight o'clock at night, when he sat down to supper.

The evening on which the admiral thus unaccountably deviated from his usual habit, King Charles IX. had invited Henry of Navarre and the Duc de Guise to sup with him. After the repast he took them into his chamber, and was busily explaining to them the ingenious mechanism of a wolf-trap he had invented, when, interrupting himself, —

"Isn't the admiral coming to-night?" he asked. "Who has seen him to-day and can tell me anything about him?"

"I have," said the King of Navarre; "and if your Majesty is anxious about his health, I can reassure you, for I saw him this morning at six, and this evening at seven o'clock."

"Aha!" replied the King, whose eyes were instantly fixed with a searching expression on his brother-in-law; "for a new-married man, Harry, you are very early."

"Yes, sire," answered the King of Navarre, "I wished to inquire of the admiral, who knows everything, whether some gentlemen I am expecting are on their way hither."

"More gentlemen! why, you had eight hundred on the day of your wedding, and fresh ones join you every day. You are surely not going to invade us?" said Charles IX., smiling.

The Duc de Guise frowned.

"Sire," returned the Béarnais, "a war with Flanders is spoken of, and I am collecting round me all those gentlemen of my country and its neighborhood whom I think can be useful to your Majesty."

The duke, calling to mind the pretended project Henry had mentioned to Marguerite the day of their marriage, listened still more attentively.

"Well, well," replied the King, with his sinister smile, "the more the better; let them all come, Henry. But who are these gentlemen? — brave ones, I trust."

"I know not, sire, if my gentlemen will ever equal those of your Majesty, or the Duc d'Anjou's, or the Duc de Guise's, but I know that they will do their best."

"Do you expect many?"

"Ten or a dozen more."

"What are their names?"

"Sire, their names escape me, and with the exception of one, whom Téligny recommended to me as a most accomplished gentleman, and whose name is De la Mole, I cannot tell."

"De la Mole!" exclaimed the King, who was deeply skilled in the science of genealogy; "is he not a Lerac de la Mole, a Provençal?"

"Exactly so, sire; you see I recruit even in Provence."

"And I," added the Duc de Guise, with a sarcastic smile, "go even further than his majesty the King of Navarre, for I seek even in Piedmont all the trusty Catholics I can find."

"Catholic or Huguenot," interrupted the King, "it little matters to me, so they are brave."

The King's face while he uttered these words, which thus united Catholics and Huguenots in his thoughts, bore such an expression of indifference that the duke himself was surprised.

"Your Majesty is occupied with the Flemings," said the admiral, to whom Charles had some days previously accorded the favor of entering without being announced, and who had overheard the King's last words.

"Ah! here is my father the admiral!" cried Charles, opening his arms. "We were speaking of war, of gentlemen, of brave men — and *he* comes. It is like the lodestone which attracts the iron. My brother-in-law of Navarre and my cousin of Guise are expecting reinforcements for your army. That was what we were talking about."

"And these reinforcements are on their way," said the admiral.

"Have you had news of them?" asked the Béarnais.

"Yes, my son, and particularly of M. de la Mole; he was at Orléans yesterday, and will be in Paris to-morrow or the day after."

"The devil! You must be a sorcerer, admiral," said the Duc de Guise, "to know what is taking place at thirty or forty leagues' distance. I should like to know for a certainty what happened or is happening before Orléans."

Coligny remained unmoved at this savage onslaught, which evidently alluded to the death of François de Guise, the duke's father, killed before Orléans by Poltrot de Méré, and not without a suspicion that the admiral had advised the crime.

"Sir," replied he, coldly and with dignity, "I am a sorcerer whenever I wish to know anything positively that concerns my own affairs or the King's. My courier arrived an hour ago from Orléans, having travelled, thanks to the post, thirty-two leagues in a day. As M. de la Mole has only his own horse, he rides but ten leagues a day, and will not arrive in Paris before the 24th. Here is all my magic."

"Bravo, my father, a clever answer!" cried Charles IX.; "teach these young men that wisdom as well as age has whitened your hair and beard; so now we will send them to talk of their tournaments and their love-affairs and you and I will stay and talk of our wars. Good councillors make good kings, my father. Leave us, gentlemen. I wish to talk with the admiral."

The two young men took their departure; the King of Navarre first, then the Duc de Guise; but outside the door they separated, after a formal salute.

Coligny followed them with his eyes, not without anxiety, for he never saw those two personified hatreds meet without a dread that some new lightning flash would leap forth. Charles IX. saw what was passing in his mind, and, going to him, laid his hand on his arm:

"Have no fear, my father; I am here to preserve peace and obedience. I am really a king, now that my mother is no longer queen, and she is no longer queen now that Coligny is my father."

"Oh, sire!" said the admiral, "Queen Catharine" —

"Is a marplot. Peace is impossible with her. These Italian Catholics are furious, and will hear of nothing but extermination; now, for my part, I not only wish to pacify, but I wish to put power into the hands of those that profess the reformed religion. The others are too dissolute, and scandalize me by their love affairs and their quarrels. Shall I speak frankly to you?" continued Charles, redoubling in energy. "I mistrust every one about me except my new friends. I suspect Tavannes's ambition. Vieilleville cares only for good wine, and would betray his king for a cask of Malvoisie; Montmorency thinks only of the chase, and spends all his time among his dogs and falcons; the Comte de Retz is a Spaniard; the De Guises are Lorraines. I think there are no true Frenchmen in France, except myself, my brother-in-law of Navarre, and you; but I am chained to the throne, and cannot command armies; it is as much as I can do to hunt at my ease at Saint Germain or Rambouillet. My brother-in-law of Navarre is too young and too inexperienced; besides, he seems to me exactly like his father Antoine, ruined by women. There is but you, my father, who can be called, at the same time, as brave as Cæsar and as wise as Plato; so that I scarcely know what to do — keep you near me, as my adviser, or send you to the army, as its general. If you act as my counsellor, who will command? If you command, who will be my counsellor?"

"Sire," said Coligny, "we must conquer first, and then take counsel after the victory."

"That is your advice — so be it; Monday you shall leave for Flanders, and I for Amboise."

"Your Majesty leaves Paris, then?"

"Yes; I am weary of this confusion, and of these fêtes. I am not a man of action; I am a dreamer. I was not born to be a king; I was born to be a poet. You shall form a council which shall govern while you are at war, and provided my mother is not in it, all will go well. I have already sent word to Ronsard to join me; and yonder, we two together, far from all tumult, far from the world, far from evil men, under our mighty trees on the banks of the river, with the murmur of

brooks in our ears, will talk about divine things, the only compensation which there is in the world for the affairs of men. Wait! Hear these lines in which I invite him to join me; I wrote them this morning."

Coligny smiled. Charles IX. rubbed his hand over his brow, yellow and shining like ivory, and repeated in a kind of sing-song the following couplets:

> "Ronsard, I am full sure that if you see me not,
> Your great King's voice by you will shortly be forgot.
> But as a slight reminder — know I still persevere
> In making skill of poesy my sole endeavor.
> And that is why I send to you this warm appeal,
> To fill your mind with new, enthusiastic zeal.
>
> "No longer then amuse yourself with home distractions;
> Past is the time for gardening and its attractions.
> Come, follow with your King, who loves you most of all,
> For that the sweet strong verses from your lips do fall.
> And if Ardoise shall not behold you shortly present,
> A mighty quarrel will break out and prove unpleasant!"

"Bravo! sire, bravo!" cried Coligny, "I am better versed in matters of war than in matters of poetry, but it seems to me that those lines are equal to the best, even written by Ronsard, or Dorat, or even Michel de l'Hôpital, Chancellor of France."

"Ah! my father!" exclaimed Charles IX.; "would what you said were true! For the title of poet, you see, is what I am ambitious, above all things, to gain; and as I said a few days ago to my master in poetry:

> "'The art of making verse, if one were criticised,
> Should ever be above the art of reigning prized.
> The crowns that you and I upon our brows are wearing,
> I as the King receive, as poet you are sharing.
> Your lofty soul, enkindled by celestial beams,
> Flames of itself, while mine with borrowed glory gleams.
> If 'mid the gods I ask which has the better showing,
> Ronsard is their delight: I, but their image glowing.
> Your lyre, which ravishes with sounds so sweet and bold,
> Subdues men's minds, while I their bodies only hold!
> It makes you master, lifts you into lofty regions,
> Where even the haughty tyrant ne'er dared claim allegiance.'"

"Sire," said Coligny, "I was well aware that your Majesty conversed with the Muses, but I did not know that you were their chief counsellor."

"After you, my father, after you. And in order that I may

not be disturbed in my relations with them, I wish to put you at the head of everything. So listen: I must now go and reply to a new madrigal my dear and illustrious poet has sent me. I cannot, therefore, give you the documents necessary to make you acquainted with the question now debating between Philip II. and myself. There is, besides, a plan of the campaign drawn up by my ministers. I will find it all for you, and give it to you to-morrow."

"At what time, sire?"

"At ten o'clock; and if by chance I am busy making verses, or in my cabinet writing, well — you will come in just the same, and take all the papers which you will find on the table in this red portfolio. The color is remarkable, and you cannot mistake it. I am now going to write to Ronsard."

"Adieu, sire!"

"Adieu, my father!"

"Your hand?"

"What, my hand? In my arms, in my heart, there is your place! Come, my old soldier, come!"

And Charles IX., drawing Coligny toward him as he bowed, pressed his lips to his white hair.

The admiral left the room, wiping away a tear.

Charles IX. followed him with his eyes as long as he could see, and listened as long as he could catch a sound; then, when he could no longer hear or see anything, he bent his head over toward his shoulder, as his custom was, and slowly entered his armory.

This armory was the king's favorite apartment; there he took his fencing-lessons with Pompée, and his poetry lessons with Ronsard. He had gathered there a great collection of the most costly weapons he had been able to find. The walls were hung with axes, shields, spears, halberds, pistols, and muskets, and that day a famous armorer had brought him a magnificent arquebuse, on the barrel of which were inlaid in silver these four lines, composed by the royal poet himself:

"*Pour maintenir la foy,*
Je suis belle et fidèle.
Aux ennemis du Roi,
Je suis belle et cruelle."[1]

---

[1] "To uphold the faith
I am beautiful and trusty.
To the king's enemies
I am beautiful and cruel."

Charles, as we have said, entered this room, and after having shut the door by which he had entered, he raised the tapestry that masked a passage leading into a little chamber, where a woman kneeling before a *priedieu* was saying her prayers.

As this movement was executed noiselessly, and the footsteps of the king, deadened by the thick carpet, made no more noise than a phantom's, the kneeling woman heard no sound, and continued to pray. Charles stood for a moment pensively looking at her.

She was a woman of thirty-four or thirty-five years of age, whose vigorous beauty was set off by the costume of the peasants of Caux. She wore the high cap so much the fashion at the court of France during the time of Isabel of Bavaria, and her red bodice was embroidered with gold, like those of the *contadine* of Nettuno and Sora. The apartment which she had for nearly twenty years occupied was close to the King's bed-chamber and presented a singular mixture of elegance and rusticity. In equal measure the palace had encroached upon the cottage, and the cottage upon the palace, so that the room combined the simplicity of the peasant woman and the luxury of the court lady.

The *priedieu* on which she knelt was of oak, marvellously carved, covered with velvet and with gold fringes, while the Bible from which she was reading (for she was of the reformed religion) was very old and torn, like those found in the poorest cottages; now everything in the room was typified by the *priedieu* and the Bible.

"Eh, Madelon!" said the King.

The kneeling woman lifted her head smilingly at the well-known voice, and rising from her knees, —

"Ah! it is you, my son," said she.

"Yes, nurse; come here."

Charles IX. let fall the curtain, and sat down on the arm of an easy-chair. The nurse appeared.

"What do you want with me, Charlot?"

"Come near, and answer in a low tone."

The nurse approached him with a familiarity such as might come from that maternal affection felt by a woman for her nursling, but attributed by the pamphlets of the time to a source infinitely less pure.

"Here I am," said she; "speak!"

"Is the man I sent for come?"

"He has been here half an hour."

Charles rose, approached the window, looked to assure himself there were no eavesdroppers, went to the door and looked out there also, shook the dust from his trophies of arms, patted a large greyhound which followed him wherever he went, stopping when he stopped and moving when he moved, — then returning to his nurse:

"Very well, nurse, let him come in," said he.

The worthy woman disappeared by the same passage by which she had entered, while the king went and leaned against a table on which were scattered arms of every kind.

Scarcely had he done so when the portière was again lifted, and the person whom he expected entered.

He was a man of about forty, his eyes gray and false, his nose curved like the beak of a screech-owl, his cheek-bones prominent. His face tried to look respectful, but all that he could do was to wear a hypocritical smile on his lips blanched with fear.

Charles gently put his hand behind him, and grasped the butt of a pistol of a new construction, that was discharged, not by a match, as formerly, but by a flint brought in contact with a wheel of steel. He fixed his dull eyes steadily on the newcomer; meantime he whistled, with perfect precision and with remarkable sweetness, one of his favorite hunting-airs.

After a pause of some minutes, during which the expression of the stranger's face grew more and more discomposed,

"You are the person," said the King, "called François de Louviers Maurevel?"

"Yes, sire."

"Captain of petardeers?"

"Yes, sire."

"I wanted to see you."

Maurevel made a low bow.

"You know," continued Charles, laying a stress on each word, "that I love all my subjects equally?"

"I know," stammered Maurevel, "that your Majesty is the father of your people."

"And that the Huguenots and Catholics are equally my children?"

Maurevel remained silent, but his agitation was manifest to the King's piercing eyes, although the person whom he was addressing was almost concealed in the darkness.

"Does this displease you," said the King, "you who have waged such a bitter war on the Huguenots?"

Maurevel fell on his knees.

"Sire," stammered he, "believe that"—

"I believe," continued Charles, looking more and more keenly at Maurevel, while his eyes, which at first had seemed like glass, now became almost fiery, "I believe that you had a great desire at Moncontour to kill the admiral, who has just left me; I believe you missed your aim, and that then you entered the army of my brother, the Duc d'Anjou; I believe that then you went for a second time over to the prince's and there took service in the company of M. de Mouy de Saint Phale"—

"Oh, sire!"

"A brave gentleman from Picardy"—

"Sire, sire!" cried Maurevel, "do not overwhelm me."

"He was a brave officer," continued Charles, whose features assumed an aspect of almost ferocious cruelty, "who received you as if you had been his son; fed you, lodged you, and clothed you."

Maurevel uttered a despairing sigh.

"You called him your father, I believe," continued the King, pitilessly, "and a tender friendship existed between you and the young De Mouy, his son."

Maurevel, still on his knees, bowed low, more and more crushed under the indignation of the King, who stood immovable, like a statue whose lips only are endowed with vitality.

"By the way," continued the King, "M. de Guise was to give you ten thousand crowns if you killed the admiral — was he not?"

The assassin in consternation struck his forehead against the floor.

"As regards your worthy father, the Sieur de Mouy, you were one day acting as his escort in a reconnaissance toward Chevreux. He dropped his whip and dismounted to pick it up. You were alone with him; you took a pistol from your holster, and while he was bending over, you shot him in the back; then seeing he was dead — for you killed him on the spot — you escaped on the horse he had given you. This is your history, I believe?"

And as Maurevel remained mute under this accusation, every circumstance of which was true, Charles IX. began to

whistle again, with the same precision and melody, the same hunting-air.

"Now, then, murderer!" said he after a little, "do you know I have a great mind to have you hanged?"

"Oh, your Majesty!" cried Maurevel.

"Young De Mouy entreated me to do so only yesterday, and I scarcely knew what answer to make him, for his demand was perfectly just."

Maurevel clasped his hands.

"All the more just, because I am, as you say, the father of my people; and because, as I answered you, now that I am reconciled to the Huguenots, they are as much my children as the Catholics."

"Sire," said Maurevel, in despair, "my life is in your hands; do with it what you will."

"You are quite right, and I would not give a groat for it."

"But, sire," asked the assassin, "is there no means of redeeming my crime?"

"None that I know of; only if I were in your place — but thank God I am not"—

"Well, sire, if you were in my place?" murmured Maurevel, his eyes fixed on the King's lips.

"I think I could extricate myself," said the King.

Maurevel raised himself on one knee and one hand, fixing his eyes upon Charles to make certain that he was not jesting.

"I am very fond of young De Mouy," said the King; "but I am equally fond of my cousin De Guise; and if my cousin asked me to spare a man that the other wanted me to hang, I confess I should be embarrassed; but for policy as well as religion's sake I should comply with my cousin De Guise's request, for De Mouy, brave captain though he be, is but a petty personage compared with a prince of Lorraine."

During these words, Maurevel slowly rose, like a man whose life is saved.

"In your critical situation it would be a very important thing to gain my cousin De Guise's favor. So I am going to tell you what he said to me last night."

Maurevel drew nearer.

"'Imagine, sire,' said he to me, 'that every morning, at ten o'clock, my deadliest enemy passes down the Rue Saint Germain l'Auxerrois, on his return from the Louvre. I see him from a barred window in the room of my old preceptor, the

Canon Pierre Piles, and I pray the devil to open the earth and swallow him in its abysses.' Now, Maître Maurevel," continued the King, "perhaps if you were the devil, or if for an instant you should take his place, that would perhaps please my cousin De Guise."

Maurevel's infernal smile came back to his lips, though they were still bloodless with terror, and he stammered out these words:

"But, sire, I cannot make the earth open."

"Yet you made it open wide enough for the worthy De Mouy, if I remember correctly. After this you will tell me how with a pistol — have you not that pistol still?"

"Forgive me, sire, I am a still better marksman with an arquebuse than a pistol," replied Maurevel, now quite reassured.

"Pistol or arquebuse makes no difference," said the King; "I am sure my cousin De Guise will not cavil over the choice of methods."

"But," said Maurevel, "I must have a weapon I can rely on, as, perhaps, I shall have to fire from a long distance."

"I have ten arquebuses in this room," replied Charles IX., "with which I can hit a crown-piece at a hundred and fifty paces — will you try one?"

"Most willingly, sire!" cried Maurevel, with the greatest joy, going in the direction of one which was standing in a corner of the room. It was the one which that day had been brought to the King.

"No, not that one," said the King, "not that one; I reserve that for myself. Some day I am going to have a grand hunt and then I hope to use it. Take any other you like."

Maurevel took one down from a trophy.

"And who is this enemy, sire?" asked the assassin.

"How should I know," replied Charles, withering the wretch with his contemptuous look.

"I must ask M. de Guise, then," faltered Maurevel.

The King shrugged his shoulders.

"Do not ask," said he; "for M. de Guise will not answer. Do people generally answer such questions? Those that do not wish to be hanged must guess them."

"But how shall I know him?"

"I tell you he passes the Canon's house every morning at ten o'clock."

"But many pass that house. Would your Majesty deign to give me any certain sign?"

"Oh, that is easy enough; to-morrow, for example, he will carry a red morocco portfolio under his arm."

"That is sufficient, sire."

"You still have the fast horse M. de Mouy gave you?"

"Sire, I have one of the fleetest of horses."

"Oh, I am not in the least anxious about you; only it is as well to let you know the monastery has a back door."

"Thanks, sire; pray Heaven for me!"

"Oh, a thousand devils! pray to Satan rather; for only by his aid can you escape a halter."

"Adieu, sire."

"Adieu! By the way, M. de Maurevel, remember that if you are heard of before ten to-morrow, or are *not* heard of afterward, there is a dungeon at the Louvre."

And Charles IX. calmly began to whistle, with more than usual precision, his favorite air.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EVENING OF THE 24TH OF AUGUST, 1572.

Our readers have not forgotten that in the previous chapter we mentioned a gentleman named De la Mole whom Henry of Navarre was anxiously expecting.

This young gentleman, as the admiral had announced, entered Paris by the gate of Saint Marcel the evening of the 24th of August, 1572; and bestowing a contemptuous glance on the numerous hostelries that displayed their picturesque signs on either side of him, he spurred his steaming horse on into the heart of the city, and after having crossed the Place Maubert, Le Petit Pont, the Pont Notre-Dame, and skirted the quays, he stopped at the end of the Rue de Bresec, which we have since corrupted into the Rue de l'Arbre Sec, and for the greater convenience of our readers we will call by its modern name.

The name pleased him, no doubt, for he entered the street, and finding on his left a large sheet-iron plate swinging, creaking on its hinges, with an accompaniment of little bells, he stopped and read these words, "*La Belle Étoile*," written on

a scroll beneath the sign, which was a most attractive one for a famished traveller, as it represented a fowl roasting in the midst of a black sky, while a man in a red cloak held out his hands and his purse toward this new-fangled constellation.

"Here," said the gentleman to himself, "is an inn that promises well, and the landlord must be a most ingenious fellow. I have always heard that the Rue de l'Arbre Sec was near the Louvre; and, provided that the interior answers to the exterior, I shall be admirably lodged."

While the newcomer was thus indulging in this monologue another horseman who had entered the street at the other end, that is to say, by the Rue Saint-Honoré, stopped also to admire the sign of *La Belle Étoile.*

The gentleman whom we already know, at least by name, rode a white steed of Spanish lineage and wore a black doublet ornamented with jet; his cloak was of dark violet velvet; his boots were of black leather, and he had a sword and poniard with hilts of chased steel.

Now if we pass from his costume to his features we shall conclude that he was twenty-four or twenty-five years of age. His complexion was dark; his eyes were blue; he had a delicate mustache and brilliant teeth which seemed to light up his whole face when his exquisitely modelled lips parted in a sweet and melancholy smile.

The contrast between him and the second traveller was very striking. Beneath his cocked hat escaped a profusion of frizzled hair, red rather than brown; beneath this mop of hair sparkled a pair of gray eyes which at the slightest opposition grew so fierce that they seemed black; a fair complexion, thin lips, a tawny mustache, and admirable teeth completed the description of his face. Taken all in all, with his white skin, lofty stature, and broad shoulders, he was indeed a *beau cavalier* in the ordinary acceptation of the term, and during the last hour which he had employed in staring up at all the windows, under the pretext of looking for signs, he had attracted the general attention of women, while the men, though they may have felt inclined to laugh at his scanty cloak, his tight-fitting small-clothes, and his old-fashioned boots, checked their rising mirth with a most cordial *Dieu vous garde*, after they had more attentively studied his face, which every moment assumed a dozen different expressions, but never that good-natured one characteristic of a bewildered provincial.

He it was who first addressed the other gentleman who, as I have said, was gazing at the hostelry of *La Belle Étoile.*

"By Heaven! monsieur," said he, with that horrible mountain accent which would instantly distinguish a native of Piedmont among a hundred strangers, "we are close to the Louvre, are we not? At all events, I think your choice is the same as mine, and I am highly flattered by it."

"Monsieur," replied the other, with a Provençal accent which rivalled that of his companion, "I believe this inn is near the Louvre. However, I am still deliberating whether or not I shall have the honor of sharing your opinion. I am in a quandary."

"You have not yet decided, sir? Nevertheless, the house is attractive. But perhaps, after all, I have been won over to it by your presence. Yet you will grant that is a pretty painting?"

"Very! and it is for that very reason I mistrust it. Paris, I am told, is full of sharpers, and you may be just as well tricked by a sign as by anything else."

"By Heaven!" replied the Piedmontese, "I don't care a fig for their tricks; and if the host does not serve me a chicken as well roasted as the one on his sign, I will put him on the spit, nor will I let him off till I have done him to a turn. Come, let us go in."

"You have decided me," said the Provençal, laughing; "precede me, I beg."

"Oh, sir, on my soul I could not think of it, for I am only your most obedient servant, the Comte Annibal de Coconnas."

"And I, monsieur, but the Comte Joseph Hyacinthe Boniface de Lerac de la Mole, equally at your service."

"Since that is the case, let us go in together, arm in arm."

The result of this conciliatory proposition was that the two young men got off their horses, threw the bridles to the ostler, linked arms, adjusted their swords, and approached the door of the inn, where the landlord was standing. But contrary to the custom of men of his profession, the worthy proprietor seemed not to notice them, so busy was he talking with a tall, sallow man, wrapped in a drab-colored cloak like an owl buried in his feathers.

The two gentlemen were so near the landlord and his friend in the drab-colored cloak that Coconnas, indignant that he

and his companion should be treated with such lack of consideration, touched the landlord's sleeve.

He appeared suddenly to perceive them, and dismissed his friend with an "*Au revoir!* come soon and let me know the hour appointed."

"Well, *monsieur le drole*," said Coconnas, "do not you see we have business with you?"

"I beg pardon, gentlemen," said the host; "I did not see you."

"Eh, by Heaven! then you ought to have seen us; and now that you do see us, say, 'Monsieur le Comte,' and not merely 'Monsieur,' if you please."

La Mole stood by, leaving Coconnas, who seemed to have undertaken the affair, to speak; but by the scowling on his face it was evident that he was ready to come to his assistance when the moment of action should present itself.

"Well, what is your pleasure, Monsieur le Comte?" asked the landlord, in a quiet tone.

"Ah, that's better; is it not?" said Coconnas, turning to La Mole, who nodded affirmatively. "Monsieur le Comte and myself, attracted by the sign of your establishment, wish to sup and sleep here to-night."

"Gentlemen," said the host, "I am very sorry, but I have only one chamber, and I am afraid that would not suit you."

"So much the better," said La Mole; "we will go and lodge somewhere else."

"By no means," said Coconnas, "I shall stay here; my horse is tired. I will have the room, since you will not."

"Ah! that is quite different," replied the host, with the same cool tone of impertinence. "If there is only one of you I cannot lodge you at all, then."

"By Heaven!" cried Coconnas, "here's a witty animal! Just now you could not lodge us because we were two, and now you have not room for one. You will not lodge us at all, then?"

"Since you take this high tone, gentlemen, I will answer you frankly."

"Answer, then; only answer quickly."

"Well, then, I should prefer not to have the honor of lodging you at all."

"For what reason?" asked Coconnas, growing white with rage.

"Because you have no servants, and for one master's room full, I should have two servants' rooms empty; so that, if I let you have the master's room, I run the risk of not letting the others."

"Monsieur de la Mole," said Coconnas, "do you not think we ought to massacre this fellow?"

"Decidedly," said La Mole, preparing himself, together with Coconnas, to lay his whip over the landlord's back.

But the landlord contented himself with retreating a step or two, despite this two-fold demonstration, which was not particularly reassuring, considering that the two gentlemen appeared so full of determination.

"It is easy to see," said he, in a tone of raillery, "that these gentlemen are just from the provinces. At Paris it is no longer the fashion to massacre innkeepers who refuse to let them rooms — only great men are massacred nowadays and not the common people; and if you make any disturbance, I will call my neighbors, and you shall be beaten yourselves, and that would be an indignity for two such gentlemen."

"Why! he is laughing at us," cried Coconnas, in a rage.

"Gregoire, my arquebuse," said the host, with the same voice with which he would have said, "Give these gentleman a chair."

"*Trippe del papa!*" cried Coconnas, drawing his sword; "warm up, Monsieur de la Mole."

"No, no; for while we warm up, our supper will get cold."

"What, you think" — cried Coconnas.

"That Monsieur de la Belle Étoile is right; only he does not know how to treat his guests, especially when they are gentlemen, for instead of brutally saying, 'Gentlemen, I do not want you,' it would have been better if he had said, 'Enter, gentlemen' — at the same time reserving to himself the right to charge in his bill, master's room, so much; servants' room, so much."

With these words, La Mole gently pushed by the landlord, who was just on the point of taking his arquebuse, and entered with Coconnas.

"Well," said Coconnas, "I am sorry to sheathe my sword before I have ascertained that it is as sharp as that rascal's larding-needle."

"Patience, my dear friend, patience," said La Mole. "All the inns in Paris are full of gentlemen come to attend the

King of Navarre's marriage or attracted by the approaching war with Flanders; we should not find another lodging; besides, perhaps it is the custom at Paris to receive strangers in this manner."

"By Heaven! how patient you are, Monsieur de la Mole!" muttered Coconnas, curling his red mustache with rage and hurling the lightning of his eyes on the landlord. "But let the scoundrel take care; for if his cooking be bad, if his bed be hard, his wine less than three years in bottle, and his waiter be not as pliant as a reed" —

"There! there! my dear gentleman!" said the landlord, whetting his knife on a strap, "you may make yourself easy; you are in the land of Cocagne."

Then in a low tone he added:

"These are some Huguenots; traitors have grown so insolent since the marriage of their Béarnais with Mademoiselle Margot!"

Then, with a smile that would have made his guests shudder had they seen it:

"How strange it would be if I were just to have two Huguenots come to my house, when" —

"Now, then," interrupted Coconnas, pointedly, "are we going to have any supper?"

"Yes, as soon as you please, monsieur," returned the landlord, softened, no doubt, by the last reflection.

"Well, then, the sooner the better," said Coconnas; and turning to La Mole:

"Pray, Monsieur le Comte, while they are putting our room in order, tell me, do you think Paris seems a gay city?"

"Faith! no," said La Mole. "All the faces I have seen looked scared or forbidding; perhaps the Parisians also are afraid of the storm; see how very black the sky ls, and the air feels heavy."

"Tell me, count, are you not bound for the Louvre?"

"Yes! and you also, Monsieur de Coconnas."

"Well, let us go together."

"It is rather late to go out, is it not?" said La Mole.

"Early or late, I must go; my orders are peremptory — 'Come instantly to Paris, and report to the Duc de Guise without delay.'"

At the Duc de Guise's name the landlord drew nearer.

"I think the rascal is listening to us," said Coconnas, who,

as a true son of Piedmont, was very truculent, and could not forgive the proprietor of *La Belle Étoile* his rude reception of them.

"I am listening, gentlemen," replied he, taking off his cap; "but it is to serve you. I heard the great duke's name mentioned, and I came immediately. What can I do for you, gentlemen?"

"Aha! that name is magical, since it renders you so polite. Tell me, maître, — what 's your name?"

"Maître la Hurière," replied the host, bowing.

"Well, Maître la Hurière, do you think my arm is lighter than the Duc de Guise's, who makes you so civil?"

"No, Monsieur le Comte, but it is not so long," replied La Hurière; "besides," he added, "I must tell you that the great Henry is the idol of us Parisians."

"Which Henry?" asked La Mole.

"It seems to me there is only one," replied the landlord.

"You are mistaken; there is another, whom I desire you do not speak ill of, and that is Henry of Navarre; and then there is Henry de Condé, who has his share of merit."

"I do not know them," said the landlord.

"But I do; and as I am on my way to the King of Navarre, I desire you not to speak slightingly of him before me."

The landlord replied by merely touching his cap, and continued to lavish his assiduities on Coconnas:

"So monsieur is going to see the great Duc de Guise? Monsieur is a very fortunate gentleman; he has come, no doubt, for" —

"What?" asked Coconnas.

"For the festivity," replied the host, with a singular smile.

"You should say for the festivities," replied Coconnas; "for Paris, I hear, runs riot with festivals; at least there is nothing talked about but balls, festivals, and orgies. Does not every one find plenty of amusement?"

"A moderate amount, but they will have more soon, I hope."

"But the marriage of his majesty the King of Navarre has brought a great many people to Paris, has it not?" said La Mole.

"A great many Huguenots — yes," replied La Hurière, but suddenly changing his tone:

"Pardon me, gentlemen," said he, "perhaps you are of that religion?"

"I," cried Coconnas, "I am as good a Catholic as the pope himself."

La Hurière looked at La Mole, but La Mole did not or would not comprehend him.

"If you do not know the King of Navarre, Maître La Hurière," said La Mole, "perhaps you know the admiral. I have heard he has some influence at court, and as I have letters for him, perhaps you will tell me where he lives, if his name does not take the skin off your lips."

"He *did* live in the Rue de Béthisy down here at the right," replied the landlord, with an inward satisfaction he could not conceal.

"He *did* live?" exclaimed La Mole. "Has he changed his residence?"

"Yes — from this world, perhaps."

"What do you mean?" cried both the gentlemen together, "the admiral removed from this world?"

"What, Monsieur de Coconnas," pursued the landlord, with a shrewd smile, "are you a friend of the Duc de Guise, and do not know *that?*"

"Know what?"

"That the day before yesterday, as the admiral was passing along the place Saint Germain l'Auxerrois before the house of the Canon Pierre Piles, he was fired at" —

"And killed?" said La Mole.

"No; he had his arm broken and two fingers taken off; but it is hoped the balls were poisoned."

"How, wretch!" cried La Mole; "hoped?"

"Believed, I mean," said the landlord, winking at Coconnas; "do not take a word too seriously, it was a slip of the tongue."

And Maître La Hurière, turning his back on La Mole, poked out his tongue at Coconnas in the most insulting way, accompanying this action with a meaning wink.

"Really!" said Coconnas, joyfully.

"Really!" said La Mole, with sorrowful stupefaction.

"It is just as I have the honor of telling you, gentlemen," said the landlord.

"In that case," said La Mole, "I must go instantly to the Louvre. Shall I find the King of Navarre there?"

"Most likely, since he lives there."

"And I," said Coconnas, "must also go to the Louvre. Shall I find the Duc de Guise there?"

"Most likely; for only a moment ago I saw him pass with two hundred gentlemen."

"Come, then, Monsieur de Coconnas," said La Mole.

"I will follow you, sir," replied Coconnas.

"But your supper, gentlemen!" cried La Hurière.

"Ah," said La Mole, "I shall most likely sup with the King of Navarre."

"And I," said Coconnas, "with the Duc de Guise."

"And I," said the landlord, after having watched the two gentlemen on their way to the Louvre, "I will go and burnish my sallet, put a match to my arquebuse, and sharpen my partisan, for no one knows what may happen."

CHAPTER V.

OF THE LOUVRE IN PARTICULAR, AND OF VIRTUE IN GENERAL.

The two young men, directed by the first person they met, went down the Rue d'Averon, the Rue Saint Germain l'Auxerrois, and soon found themselves before the Louvre, the towers of which were beginning to be lost in the early shades of the gloaming.

"What is the matter with you?" asked Coconnas of La Mole, who, as they came in sight of the old château, stopped and gazed, not without awe, on the drawbridges, the narrow windows, and the pointed belfries, which suddenly rose before his vision.

"I scarcely know," said La Mole; "my heart beats strangely. I am not timid, but somehow this old palace seems so gloomy and terrible."

"Well, as for me, I don't know any reason for it," replied Coconnas, "but I feel in excellent spirits. My dress is somewhat disordered," he went on to say, glancing at his travelling costume, "but never mind, it looks as if I had been riding. Besides, my instructions commanded promptness and I shall be welcome because I shall have obeyed punctually."

The two young men continued their way, each under the influence of the feelings he had expressed.

There was a strong guard at the Louvre and the sentinels were doubled. Our two cavaliers were somewhat embarrassed,

therefore, but Coconnas, who had noticed that the Duc de Guise's name acted like a talisman on the Parisians, approached a sentinel, and making use of the all-powerful name, asked if by means of it he might not be allowed to enter.

The name seemed to produce its ordinary effect upon the soldier; nevertheless he asked Coconnas if he had the countersign.

Coconnas was forced to confess he had not.

"Stand back, then," said the soldier.

At this moment a person who was talking with the officer of the guard and who had overheard Coconnas ask leave to enter, broke off his conversation and came to him.

"Vat do you vant with Monsieur dee Gouise?" asked he.

"I wish to see him," said Coconnas, smiling.

"Imbossible! the duke is mit the King."

"But I have a letter for him."

"Ah, you haf a ledder for him?"

"Yes, and I have come a long distance."

"Ah! you haf gome a long tistance?"

"I have come from Piedmont."

"Vell, vell! dat iss anodder ting. And vat iss your name?"

"The Comte Annibal de Coconnas."

"Goot! goot! kif me the ledder, Monsieur Annibal, kif it to me!"

"On my word," said La Mole to himself, "a very civil man. I hope I may find one like him to conduct me to the King of Navarre."

"But kif me the ledder," said the German gentleman, holding out his hand toward Coconnas, who hesitated.

"By Heaven!" replied the Piedmontese, distrustful like a half-Italian, "I scarcely know whether I ought, as I have not the honor of knowing you."

"I am Pesme; I'm addached to Monsir le Douque de Gouise."

"Pesme," murmured Coconnas; "I am not acquainted with that name."

"It is Monsieur de Besme, my dear sir," said the sentinel. "His pronunciation misled you, that is all; you may safely give him your letter, I'll answer for it."

"Ah! Monsieur de Besme!" cried Coconnas; "of course I know you! with the greatest pleasure. Here is the letter. Pardon my hesitation; but fidelity requires one to be careful."

"Goot, goot! dere iss no need of any egscuse," said De Besme.

"Perhaps, sir," said La Mole, "you will be so kind as to do the same for my letter that you have done for my friend?"

"And vat iss your name, monsir?"

"The Comte Lerac de la Mole."

"Gount Lerag dee la Mole?"

"Yes."

"I don't know de name."

"It is not strange that I have not the honor of being known to you, sir, for like the Comte de Coconnas I am only just arrived in Paris."

"Where do you gome from?"

"From Provence."

"Vit a ledder?"

"Yes."

"For Monsir dee Gouise?"

"No; for his majesty the King of Navarre."

"I do not pelong to de King of Navarre," said De Besme, coldly, "and derefore I gannot dake your ledder."

And turning on his heel, he entered the Louvre, bidding Coconnas follow him.

La Mole was left alone.

At this moment a troop of cavaliers, about a hundred in number, came out from the Louvre by a gate alongside that by which Besme and Coconnas had entered.

"Aha!" said the sentinel to his comrade, "there are De Mouy and his Huguenots! See how joyous they all are! The King has probably promised them to put to death the assassin of the admiral; and as it was he who murdered De Mouy's father, the son will kill two birds with one stone."

"Excuse me, my good fellow," interrupted La Mole, "did you not say that officer is M. de Mouy?"

"Yes, sir."

"And that those with him are" —

"Are heretics — I said so."

"Thank you," said La Mole, affecting not to notice the scornful word *parpaillots*, employed by the sentinel. "That was all I wished to know;" and advancing to the chief of the cavaliers:

"Sir," said he, "I am told you are M. de Mouy."

"Yes, sir," returned the officer, courteously.

"Your name, well known among those of our faith, emboldens me to address you, sir, to ask a special favor."

"What may that be, sir, — but first whom have I the honor of addressing?"

"The Comte Lerac de la Mole."

The young men bowed to each other.

"What can I do for you, sir?" asked De Mouy.

"Sir, I am just arrived from Aix, and bring a letter from M. d'Auriac, Governor of Provence. This letter is directed to the King of Navarre and contains important and pressing news. How can I give it to him? How can I enter the Louvre?"

"Nothing is easier than to enter the Louvre, sir," replied De Mouy; "but I fear the King of Navarre will be too busy to see you at this hour. However, if you please, I will take you to his apartments, and then you must manage for yourself."

"A thousand thanks!"

"Come, then," said De Mouy.

De Mouy dismounted, threw the reins to his lackey, stepped toward the wicket, passed the sentinel, conducted La Mole into the chateau, and, opening the door leading to the king's apartments:

"Enter, and inquire for yourself, sir," said he.

And saluting La Mole, he retired.

La Mole, left alone, looked round.

The ante-room was vacant. One of the inner doors was open. He advanced a few paces and found himself in a passage.

He knocked and spoke, but no one answered. The profoundest silence reigned in this part of the Louvre.

"What was told me about the stern etiquette of this place?" said he to himself. "One may come and go in this palace as if it were a public place."

Then he called again, but without obtaining any better result than before.

"Well, let us walk straight on," thought he, "I must meet some one," and he proceeded down the corridor, which grew darker and darker.

Suddenly the door opposite that by which he had entered opened, and two pages appeared, lighting a lady of noble bearing and exquisite beauty.

The glare of the torches fell full on La Mole, who stood motionless.

The lady stopped also.

"What do you want, sir?" said she, in a voice which fell upon his ears like exquisite music.

"Oh, madame," said La Mole, casting down his eyes, "pardon me; I have just parted from M. de Mouy, who was so good as to conduct me here, and I wish to see the King of Navarre."

"His majesty is not here, sir; he is with his brother-in-law. But, in his absence, could you not say to the queen" —

"Oh, yes, madame," returned La Mole, "if I could obtain audience of her."

"You have it already, sir."

"What?" cried La Mole.

"I am the Queen of Navarre."

La Mole made such a hasty movement of surprise and alarm that it caused the queen to smile.

"Speak, sir," said Marguerite, "but speak quickly, for the queen mother is waiting for me."

"Oh, madame, if the queen mother is waiting for you," said La Mole, "suffer me to leave you, for just now it would be impossible for me to speak to you. I am incapable of collecting my ideas. The sight of you has dazzled me. I no longer think, I can only admire."

Marguerite advanced graciously toward the handsome young man, who, without knowing it, was acting like a finished courtier.

"Recover yourself, sir," said she; "I will wait and they will wait for me."

"Pardon me, madame," said La Mole, "if I did not salute your majesty at first with all the respect which you have a right to expect from one of your humblest servants, but" —

"You took me for one of my ladies?" said Marguerite.

"No, madame; but for the shade of the beautiful Diane de Poitiers, who is said to haunt the Louvre."

"Come, sir," said Marguerite, "I see you will make your fortune at court; you said you had a letter for the king, it was not needed, but no matter! Where is it? I will give it to him — only make haste, I beg of you."

In a twinkling La Mole threw open his doublet, and drew from his breast a letter enveloped in silk.

Marguerite took the letter, and glanced at the writing.

"Are you not Monsieur de la Mole?" asked she.

"Yes, madame. Oh, *mon Dieu!* Can I hope my name is known to your majesty?"

"I have heard the king, my husband, and the Duc d'Alençon, my brother, speak of you. I know they expect you."

And in her corsage, glittering with embroidery and diamonds, she slipped the letter which had just come from the young man's doublet and was still warm from the vital heat of his body. La Mole eagerly watched Marguerite's every movement.

"Now, sir," said she, "descend to the gallery below, and wait until some one comes to you from the King of Navarre or the Duc d'Alençon. One of my pages will show you the way."

And Marguerite, as she said these words, went on her way. La Mole drew himself up close to the wall. But the passage was so narrow and the Queen of Navarre's farthingale was so voluminous that her silken gown brushed against the young man's clothes, while a penetrating perfume hovered where she passed.

La Mole trembled all over and, feeling that he was in danger of falling, he tried to find a support against the wall.

Marguerite disappeared like a vision.

"Are you coming, sir?" asked the page who was to conduct La Mole to the lower gallery.

"Oh, yes — yes!" cried La Mole, joyfully; for as the page led him the same way by which Marguerite had gone, he hoped that by making haste he might see her again.

And in truth, as he reached the top of the staircase, he perceived her below; and whether she heard his step or looked round by chance, Marguerite raised her head, and La Mole saw her a second time.

"Oh," said he, as he followed the page, "she is not a mortal — she is a goddess, and as Vergilius Maro says: '*Et vera incessu patuit dea.*'"

"Well?" asked the page.

"Here I am," replied La Mole, "excuse me, here I am."

The page, preceding La Mole, descended a story lower, opened one door, then another, and stopping,

"You are to wait here," said he.

La Mole entered the gallery, the door of which closed after him.

The gallery was vacant except for one gentleman, who was sauntering up and down, and seemed also waiting for some one.

The evening was by this time beginning to scatter monstrous shadows from the depths of the vaulted ceiling, and though the two gentlemen were not twenty paces apart, it was impossible for either to recognize the other's face.

La Mole drew nearer.

"By Heaven!" muttered he as soon as he was within a few feet of the other, "here is Monsieur le Comte de Coconnas again!"

At the sound of footsteps Coconnas had already turned, and was staring at La Mole with no less astonishment than the other showed.

"By Heaven!" cried he. "The devil take me but here is Monsieur de la Mole! What am I doing? Swearing in the King's palace? Well, never mind; it seems the King swears in a different way from mine, and even in churches. Here we are at last, then, in the Louvre!"

"Yes; I suppose Monsieur de Besme introduced you?"

"Oh, he is a charming German. Who brought you in?"

"M. de Mouy — I told you the Huguenots had some interest at court. Have you seen Monsieur de Guise?"

"No, not yet. Have you obtained your audience with the King of Navarre?"

"No, but I soon shall. I was brought here and told to wait."

"Ah, you will see there is some great supper under way and we shall be placed side by side. What a strange chance! For two hours fortune has joined us! But what is the matter? You seem ill at ease."

"I?" exclaimed La Mole, shivering, for in truth he was still dazzled by the vision which had been vouchsafed him. "Oh, no, but the place in which we are brings into my mind a throng of reflections."

"Philosophical ones, I suppose. Just the same as it is with me. When you came in I was just going over in my mind all my tutor's recommendations. Monsieur le Comte, are you acquainted with Plutarch?"

"Certainly I am!" exclaimed La Mole, smiling, "he is one of my favorite authors."

"Very well," Coconnas went on gravely, "this great man

does not seem to me so far wrong when he compares the gifts of nature to brilliant but ephemeral flowers, while he regards virtue as a balsamic plant of imperishable perfume and sovereign efficacy for the healing of wounds."

"Do you know Greek, Monsieur de Coconnas?" said La Mole, gazing keenly at his companion.

"No, I do not; but my tutor did, and he strongly advised me when I should be at court to talk about virtue. 'That looks well,' he said. So I assure you I am well fortified with it. By the way, are you hungry?"

"No."

"And yet you seemed anxious to taste the broiled fowl of *La Belle Étoile*. As for me, I am dying of starvation!"

"Well, Monsieur de Coconnas, here is a fine chance for you to make use of your arguments on virtue and to put your admiration for Plutarch to the proof, for that great writer says somewhere: 'It is good to accustom the soul to pain and the stomach to hunger'—'*Prepon esti tên men psychên odunê, ton de gastéra semó askeïn.*'"

"Ah, indeed! So you know Greek?" exclaimed Coconnas in surprise.

"Faith, yes," replied La Mole, "my tutor taught me."

"By Heaven! count, your fortune is made if that is so; you will compose poetry with Charles IX. and you will talk Greek with Queen Marguerite!"

"Not to reckon that I can still talk Gascon with the King of Navarre!" added La Mole, laughing.

At this moment the door communicating with the King's apartment opened, a step was heard, and a shade was seen approaching in the darkness. This shade materialized into a body. This body belonged to Monsieur de Besme.

He scrutinized both gentlemen, so as to pick out the one he wanted, and then motioned Coconnas to follow him.

Coconnas waved his hand to La Mole.

De Besme conducted Coconnas to the end of the gallery, opened a door, and stood at the head of a staircase.

He looked cautiously round, then up and down.

"Monsir de Gogonnas," said he, "vere are you staying?"

"At *La Belle Étoile*, Rue de l'Arbre Sec."

"Goot, goot! dat is glose by. Go pack to your hodel gwick and to-nide"—

He looked around him again.

"Well, to-night?"

"Vell, gome here mit a vite gross in your hat. De bass-vord is 'Gouise.' Hush! nod a vord."

"What time am I to come?"

"Ven you hear de dogsin."

"What's the dogsin?" asked Coconnas.

"Ja! de dogsin — pum! pum!"

"Oh! the tocsin!"

"Ja, vot elus tid I zay?"

"Good — I shall be here," said Coconnas.

And, saluting De Besme, he took his departure, asking himself:

"What the devil does he mean and why should the tocsin be rung? No matter! I persist in my opinion: Monsieur de Besme is a charming Tedesco — Why not wait for the Comte de la Mole? Ah faith, no! he will probably be invited to supper with the King of Navarre."

And Coconnas set forth for the Rue de l'Arbre Sec, where the sign of *La Belle Étoile* like a lodestone attracted him.

Meantime a gallery door which led to the King of Navarre's apartment opened, and a page approached Monsieur de la Mole.

"You are the Comte de la Mole?" said he.

"That is my name."

"Where do you lodge?"

"At *La Belle Étoile*, Rue de l'Arbre Sec."

"Good, that is close to the Louvre. Listen — his majesty the King of Navarre has desired me to inform you that he cannot at present receive you; perhaps he may send for you to-night; but if to-morrow morning you have received no word, come to the Louvre."

"But supposing the sentinel refuse me admission."

"True: the countersign is 'Navarre;' that word will open all doors to you."

"Thanks."

"Wait, my dear sir, I am ordered to escort you to the wicket gate for fear you should get lost in the Louvre."

"By the way, how about Coconnas?" said La Mole to himself as soon as he was fairly in the street. "Oh, he will remain to supper with the Duc de Guise."

But as soon as he entered Maître la Hurière's the first thing La Mole saw was Coconnas seated before a gigantic omelet.

"Oho!" cried Coconnas, laughing heartily, "I see you have no more dined with the King of Navarre than I have supped with the Duc de Guise."

"Faith, no."

"Are you hungry now?"

"I believe I am."

"In spite of Plutarch?"

"Count," said La Mole, laughing, "Plutarch says in another place: 'Let him that hath, share with him that hath not.' Are you willing for the love of Plutarch to share your omelet with me? Then while we eat we will converse on virtue!"

"Oh, faith, not on that subject," cried Coconnas. "It is all right when one is at the Louvre and there is danger of eavesdroppers and one's stomach is empty. Sit down and have something to eat with me."

"There, now I see that fate has decidedly made us inseparable. Are you going to sleep here?"

"I have not the least idea."

"Nor I either."

"At any rate, I know where I shall spend the night."

"Where?"

"Wherever you do: that is settled."

And both burst out laughing and then set to work to do honor to Maître la Hurière's omelet.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DEBT PAID.

Now if the reader is curious to know why Monsieur de la Mole was not received by the King of Navarre, why Monsieur de Coconnas was not permitted to see Monsieur de Guise, and lastly, why instead of eating pheasants, partridges, and venison at the Louvre, both supped at the hotel of the *Belle Étoile* on an omelet, he must kindly accompany us to the old palace of kings, and follow the queen, Marguerite of Navarre, whom La Mole had lost from sight at the entrance of the grand gallery.

While Marguerite was descending the staircase, the duke, Henry de Guise, whom she had not seen since the night of her marriage, was in the King's closet. To this staircase which

Marguerite was descending there was an outlet. To the closet in which Monsieur de Guise was there was a door, and this door and this outlet both led to a corridor, which corridor led to the apartments of the queen mother, Catharine de Médicis.

Catharine de Médicis was alone, seated near a table, with her elbow leaning on a prayer-book half open, and her head leaning on a hand still remarkably beautiful, — by reason of the cosmetics with which she was supplied by the Florentine Réné, who united the double duty of perfumer and poisoner to the queen mother.

The widow of Henry II. was clothed in mourning, which she had not thrown off since her husband's death. At this period she was about fifty-two or fifty-three years of age, and owing to her stoutness and fair complexion she preserved much of her early beauty.

Her rooms, like her dress, paraded her widowhood. Everything in them bore the impress of bereavement: hangings, walls, and furniture were all in mourning. Only above a kind of dais covering a throne, where at that moment lay sleeping the little greyhound presented to the queen mother by her son-in-law, Henry of Navarre, and bearing the mythological name of Phœbe, was a painted rainbow surrounded by that Greek motto which King François I. had given her: "*Phôs pherei ê de kai aïthzên;*" which may be translated:

"*He brings light and serenity.*"

Suddenly, and at a moment when the queen mother appeared deeply plunged in some thought which brought a half-hesitating smile to her carmen-painted lips, a man opened the door, raised the tapestry, and showed his pale face, saying:

"Everything is going badly."

Catharine raised her head and recognized the Duc de Guise.

"Why do you say 'Everything is going badly'?" she replied. "What do you mean, Henry."

"I mean that the King is more than ever taken with the accursed Huguenots; and if we await his leave to execute the great enterprise, we shall wait a very long time, and perhaps forever."

"Tell me what has happened," said Catharine, still preserving the tranquillity of countenance habitual to her, yet to which, when occasion served, she could give such different expressions.

"Why, just now, for the twentieth time, I asked his Majesty

whether he would still permit all those bravadoes which the gentlemen of the reformed religion indulge in, since their admiral was wounded."

"And what did my son reply?" asked Catharine.

"He replied, 'Monsieur le Duc, you must necessarily be suspected by the people as the author of the attempted assassination of my second father, the admiral; defend yourself from the imputation as best you may. As to me, I will defend myself properly, if I am insulted;' and then he turned away to feed his dogs."

"And you made no attempt to retain him?"

"Certainly I did; but he replied to me, in that tone which you so well know, and looking at me with the gaze peculiar to him, 'Monsieur le Duc, my dogs are hungry; and they are not men, whom I can keep waiting.' Whereupon I came straight to you."

"And you have done right," said the queen mother.

"But what is now to be done?"

"Try a last effort."

"And who will try it?"

"I will! Is the King alone?"

"No; M. de Tavannes is with him."

"Await me here; or, rather, follow me at a distance."

Catharine instantly rose and went to the chamber, where on Turkey carpets and velvet cushions were the King's favorite greyhounds. On perches ranged along the wall were two or three valuable falcons and a small shrike, with which Charles IX. amused himself in bringing down the little birds in the garden of the Louvre, and that of the Tuileries, which they had just begun building.

On her way the queen mother put on a pale and anguished expression, while down her cheeks rolled a last or rather a first tear.

She noiselessly approached Charles IX. as he was giving his dogs fragments of cakes cut into equal portions.

"My son," said the queen, with a trembling in her voice so cleverly affected that the King started.

"What is it, madame?" said Charles, turning round suddenly.

"My son," replied Catharine, "I would ask your leave to retire to one of your châteaux, no matter which, so that it be as distant as possible from Paris."

"And wherefore, madame?" inquired Charles IX., fixing on his mother that glassy eye which, on certain occasions, became so penetrating.

"Because every day I receive new insults from persons of the new faith; because to-day I hear that you have been threatened by the Protestants even in your own Louvre, and I do not desire to be present at such spectacles."

"But then, madame," replied Charles IX., with an expression full of conviction, "an attempt has been made to kill their admiral. An infamous murderer has already assassinated the brave M. de Mouy. *Mort de ma vie*, mother, there must be justice in a kingdom!"

"Oh, be easy on that head, my son," said Catharine; "they will not fail justice; for if you should refuse it, they will still have it in their own way: on M. de Guise to-day, on me to-morrow, and yourself later."

"Oh, madame!" said Charles, allowing a first accent of doubt to show in his voice, "do you think so?"

"Oh, my son," replied Catharine, giving way entirely to the violence of her thoughts, "do you not see that it is no longer a question of François de Guise's death or the admiral's, of the Protestant religion or the Catholic religion, but simply of the substitution of Antoine de Bourbon's son for the son of Henry the Second?"

"Come, come, mother, you are falling again into your usual exaggeration," said the King.

"What, then, have you in mind, my son?"

"To wait, mother, — to wait. All human wisdom is in this single word. The greatest, the strongest, the most skilful is he who knows how to wait."

"You may wait, then; I will not."

Catharine made a courtesy, and stepping towards the door, was about to return to her apartment.

Charles IX. stopped her.

"Well, then, really, what is best to be done, mother?" he asked, "for above all I am just, and I would have every one satisfied with me."

Catharine turned toward him.

"Come, count," she said to Tavannes, who was caressing the King's shrike, "tell the King your opinion as to what should be done."

"Will your Majesty permit me?" inquired the count.

"Speak, Tavannes! — speak."

"What does your Majesty do when, in the chase, the wounded boar turns on you?"

"By Heaven! monsieur, I wait for him, with firm foot," replied Charles, "and stab him in the throat with my boar-spear."

"Simply that he may not hurt you," remarked Catharine.

"And to amuse myself," said the King, with a sigh which indicated courage easily aroused even to ferocity; "but I should not amuse myself killing my subjects; for, after all, the Huguenots are my subjects, as well as the Catholics."

"Then, sire," said Catharine, "your subjects, the Huguenots, will do like the wild boar who escapes the spear thrust into his throat: they will bring down the throne."

"Nonsense! Do you really think so, madame?" said Charles IX., with an air which denoted that he did not place great faith in his mother's predictions.

"But have you not seen M. de Mouy and his party to-day?"

"Yes; I have seen them, for I have just left them. But what does he ask for that is not just? He has requested that his father's murderer and the admiral's assassin be put to death. Did we not punish M. de Montgommery for the death of my father and your husband, although that death was a simple accident?"

"Very well, sire," said Catharine, piqued, "let us say no more. Your majesty is under the protection of that God who gives you strength, wisdom, and confidence. But I, a poor woman whom God abandons, no doubt on account of my sins, fear and yield."

And having said this, Catharine again courteseyed and left the room, making a sign to the Duc de Guise, who had at that moment entered, to remain in her place, and try a last effort.

Charles IX. followed his mother with his eye, but this time did not recall her. He then began to caress his dogs, whistling a hunting-air.

He suddenly paused.

"My mother," said he, "is a royal spirit, and has scruples! Really, now, it is a cool proposal, to kill off some dozens of Huguenots because they come to demand justice! Is it not their right?"

"Some dozens!" murmured the Duc de Guise.

"Ah! are you here, sir?" said the King, pretending to see him for the first time. "Yes, some dozens. A tolerable waste

of life! Ah! if any one came to me and said; 'Sire, you shall be rid of all your enemies at once, and to-morrow there shall not remain one to reproach you with the death of the others,' why, then, I do not say"—

"Well, sire?"

"Tavannes," said the King, "you will tire Margot; put her back on her perch. It is no reason, because she bears the name of my sister, the Queen of Navarre, that every one should caress her."

Tavannes put the hawk on her perch, and amused himself by curling and uncurling a greyhound's ears.

"But, sire, if any one should say to your Majesty: 'Sire, your Majesty shall be delivered from all your enemies to-morrow'?"

"And by the intercession of what saint would this miracle be wrought?"

"Sire, to-day is the 24th of August, and therefore it would be by the interposition of Saint Bartholomew."

"A worthy saint," replied the King, "who allowed himself to be skinned alive!"

"So much the better; the more he suffered, the more he ought to have felt a desire for vengeance on his executioners."

"And will you, my cousin," said the King, "will you, with your pretty little gold-hilted sword, slay ten thousand Huguenots between now and to-morrow? Ha! ha! ha! *mort de ma vie!* you are very amusing, Monsieur de Guise!"

And the King burst into a loud laugh, but a laugh so forced that the room echoed with its sinister sound.

"Sire, one word — and one only," continued the duke, shuddering in spite of himself at the sound of that laugh, which had nothing human in it, — "one signal, and all is ready. I have the Swiss and eleven hundred gentlemen; I have the light horse and the citizens; your Majesty has your guards, your friends, the Catholic nobility. We are twenty to one."

"Well, then, cousin, since you are so strong, why the devil do you come to fill my ears with all this? Act without me — act"—

And the King turned again to his dogs.

Then the portière was raised, and Catharine reappeared.

"All goes well," she said to the duke; "urge him, and he will yield."

And the portière fell on Catharine, without Charles IX. seeing, or at least appearing to see her.

"But yet," continued De Guise, "I must know if, in acting as I desire, I shall act agreeably to your Majesty's views."

"Really, cousin Henry, you put the knife to my throat! But I shall live. By Heaven! am I not the king?"

"No, not yet, sire; but, if you will, you shall be so tomorrow."

"Ah — what!" continued Charles, "you would kill the King of Navarre, the Prince de Condé—in my Louvre—ah!"

Then he added, in a voice scarcely audible, — "Without the walls, I do not say"—

"Sire," cried the duke, "they are going out this evening to join in a revel with your brother, the Duc d'Alençon."

"Tavannes," said the King, with well-affected impatience, "do not you see that you are teasing the dog? Here, Actæon, — come!"

And Charles IX. went out without waiting to hear more, and Tavannes and the Duc de Guise were left almost as uncertain as before.

Meantime another scene was passing in Catharine's apartment. After she had given the Duc de Guise her counsel to remain firm, she returned to her rooms, where she found assembled the persons who were usually present when she went to bed.

Her face was now as full of joy as it had been downcast when she set out. With her most agreeable manner she dismissed her women one by one and her courtiers, and there remained only Madame Marguerite, who, seated on a coffer near the open window, was looking at the sky, absorbed in thought.

Two or three times, when she thus found herself alone with her daughter, the queen mother opened her mouth to speak, but each time a gloomy thought withheld the words ready to escape her lips.

Suddenly the portière was raised, and Henry of Navarre appeared.

The little greyhound, which was asleep on the throne, leaped up and bounded towards him.

"You here, my son!" said Catharine, starting. "Do you sup in the Louvre to-night?"

"No, madame," replied Henry, "we are going into the city to-night, with Messieurs d'Alençon and De Condé. I almost expected to find them here paying their court to you."

Catharine smiled.

"Go, gentlemen, go — men are so fortunate in being able to go about as they please! Are they not, my daughter?"

"Yes," replied Marguerite, "liberty is so glorious, so sweet a thing."

"Does that imply that I restrict yours, madame?" inquired Henry, bowing to his wife.

"No, sire; I do not complain for myself, but for women in general."

"Are you going to see the admiral, my son?" asked Catharine.

"Yes, possibly."

"Go, that will set a good example, and to-morrow you will give me news of him."

"Then, madame, I will go, since you approve of this step."

"Oh," said Catharine, "my approval is nothing— But who goes there? Send him away, send him away."

Henry started to go to the door to carry out Catharine's order; but at the same instant the portière was raised and Madame de Sauve showed her blond head.

"Madame," said she, "it is Réné, the perfumer, whom your majesty sent for."

Catharine cast a glance as quick as lightning at Henry of Navarre.

The young prince turned slightly red and then fearfully pale. Indeed, the name of his mother's assassin had been spoken; he felt that his face betrayed his emotion, and he went and leaned against the bar of the window.

The little greyhound growled.

At the same moment two persons entered — the one announced, and the other having no need to be so.

The first was Réné, the perfumer, who approached Catharine with all the servile obsequiousness of Florentine servants. He held in his hand a box, which he opened, and all the compartments were seen filled with powders and flasks.

The second was Madame de Lorraine, Marguerite's eldest sister. She entered by a small secret door, which led from the King's closet, and, all pale and trembling, and hoping not to be observed by Catharine, who was examining, with Madame

de Sauve, the contents of the box brought by René, seated herself beside Marguerite, near whom the King of Navarre was standing, with his hand on his brow, like one who tries to rouse himself from some sudden shock.

At this instant Catharine turned round.

"Daughter," she said to Marguerite, "you may retire to your room. My son, you may go and amuse yourself in the city."

Marguerite rose, and Henry turned half round.

Madame de Lorraine seized Marguerite's hand.

"Sister," she whispered, with great quickness, "in the name of the Duc de Guise, who now saves you, as you saved him, do not go from here — do not go to your apartments."

"Eh! what say you, Claude?" inquired Catharine, turning round.

"Nothing, mother."

"You were whispering to Marguerite."

"Simply to wish her good-night, and convey a greeting to her from the Duchesse de Nevers."

"And where is that fair duchess?"

"At her brother-in-law's, M. de Guise's."

Catharine looked suspiciously at the women and frowning:

"Come here, Claude," said the queen mother.

Claude obeyed, and the queen seized her hand.

"What did you say to her, indiscreet girl that you are?" she murmured, squeezing her daughter's wrist until she nearly shrieked with pain.

"Madame," said Henry to his wife, having lost nothing of the movements of the queen, Claude, or Marguerite, — "madame, will you allow me the honor of kissing your hand?"

Marguerite extended her trembling hand.

"What did she say to you?" whispered Henry, as he stooped to imprint a kiss on her hand.

"Not to go out. In the name of Heaven, do not you go out either!"

This was like a flash; but by its light, swift as it was, Henry at once detected a complete plot.

"This is not all," added Marguerite; "here is a letter, which a country gentleman brought."

"Monsieur de la Mole?"

"Yes."

"Thank you," he said, taking the letter and putting it under his doublet; and, passing in front of his bewildered wife, he placed his hand on the shoulder of the Florentine.

"Well, Maître Réné!" he said, "and how go commercial affairs?"

"Pretty well, monseigneur, — pretty well," replied the poisoner, with his perfidious smile.

"I should think so," said Henry, "with men who, like you, supply all the crowned heads at home and abroad."

"Except the King of Navarre," replied the Florentine, impudently.

"*Ventre saint gris*, Maître Réné," replied the king, "you are right; and yet my poor mother, who also bought of you, recommended you to me with her dying breath. Come to me to-morrow, Maître Réné, or day after to-morrow, and bring your best perfumes."

"That would not be a bad notion," said Catharine, smiling; "for it is said"—

"That I need some perfumery," interrupted Henry, laughing; "who told you that, mother? Was it Margot?"

"No, my son," replied Catharine, "it was Madame de Sauve."

At this moment the Duchesse de Lorraine, who in spite of all her efforts could no longer contain herself, burst into loud sobs.

Henry did not even turn toward her.

"Sister, what is the matter?" cried Marguerite, darting toward Claude.

"Nothing," said Catharine, passing between the two young women, "nothing; she has those nervous attacks, for which Mazille prescribes aromatic preparations."

And again, and with still more force than before, she pressed her eldest daughter's arm; then, turning toward the youngest:

"There, Margot," she said, "did you not hear me request you to retire to your room? If that is not sufficient, I command you."

"Excuse me, madame," replied Marguerite, trembling and pale; "I wish your majesty good-night."

"I hope your wishes may be heard. Good-night — good-night!"

Marguerite withdrew, staggering, and in vain seeking to meet her husband's eyes, but he did not even turn toward her

There was a moment's silence, during which Catharine remained with her eyes fastened on the Duchess of Lorraine, who, without speaking, looked at her mother with clasped hands.

Henry's back was still turned, but he was watching the scene in a mirror, while seeming to curl his mustache with a pomade which Réné had just given to him.

"And you, Henry," said Catharine, "are you still intending to go out?"

"Yes, that's true," exclaimed the king. "Faith, I was forgetting that the Duc d'Alençon and the Prince de Condé are waiting for me! These are admirable perfumes; they quite overpower one, and destroy one's memory. Good evening, madame."

"Good evening! To-morrow you will perhaps bring me tidings of the admiral."

"Without fail — Well, Phœbe, what is it?"

"Phœbe!" said the queen mother, impatiently.

"Call her, madame," said the Béarnais, "for she will not allow me to go out."

The queen mother rose, took the little greyhound by the collar, and held her while Henry left the apartment, with his features as calm and smiling as if he did not feel in his heart that his life was in imminent peril.

Behind him the little dog, set free by Catharine de Médicis, rushed to try and overtake him, but the door was closed, and Phœbe could only put her long nose under the tapestry and give a long and mournful howl.

"Now, Charlotte," said Catharine to Madame de Sauve, "go and find Messieurs de Guise and Tavannes, who are in my oratory, and return with them; then remain with the Duchess of Lorraine, who has the vapors."

CHAPTER VII.

THE NIGHT OF THE 24TH OF AUGUST, 1572.

When La Mole and Coconnas had finished their supper—and it was meagre enough, for the fowls of *La Belle Étoile* had their pin feathers singed only on the sign—Coconnas whirled his chair around on one leg, stretched out his feet, leaned one elbow on the table, and drinking a last glass of wine, said:

"Do you mean to go to bed instantly, Monsieur de la Mole?"

"*Ma foi!* I am very much inclined, for it is possible that I may be called up in the night."

"And I, too," said Coconnas; "but it appears to me that, under the circumstances, instead of going to bed and making those wait who are to come to us, we should do better to call for cards and play a game. They would then find us quite ready."

"I would willingly accept your proposal, sir, but I have very little money for play. I have scarce a hundred gold crowns in my valise, for my whole treasure. I rely on that with which to make my fortune!"

"A hundred gold crowns!" cried Coconnas, "and you complain? By Heaven! I have but six!"

"Why," replied La Mole, "I saw you draw from your pocket a purse which appeared not only full, but I should say bloated."

"Ah," said Coconnas, "that is to defray an old debt which I am compelled to pay to an old friend of my father, whom I suspect to be, like yourself, somewhat of a Huguenot. Yes, there are here a hundred rose nobles," he added, slapping his pocket, "but these hundred rose nobles belong to Maître Mercandon. My personal patrimony, as I tell you, is limited to six crowns."

"How, then, can you play?"

"Why, it is because of that I wished to play. Besides, an idea occurs to me."

"What is it?"

"We both came to Paris on the same errand."

"Yes."

"Each of us has a powerful protector."

"Yes."

"You rely on yours, as I rely on mine."

"Yes."

"Well, then, it occurred to me that we should play first for our money, and afterwards for the first favor which came to us, either from the court or from our mistress" —

"Really, a very ingenious idea," said La Mole, with a smile, "but I confess I am not such a gamester as to risk my whole life on a card or a turn of the dice; for the first favor which may come either to you or to me will, in all probability, involve our whole life."

"Well, let us drop out of account the first favor from the court and play for our mistress's first favor."

"I see only one objection to that," said La Mole.

"What objection?"

"I have no mistress!"

"Nor I either. But I expect to have one soon. Thank God! we are not cut out to want one long!"

"Undoubtedly, as you say, you will have your wish, Monsieur de Coconnas, but as I have not the same confidence in my love-star, I feel that it would be robbery, I to pit my fortune against yours. But, if you will, let us play until your six crowns be lost or doubled, and if lost, and you desire to continue the game, you are a gentleman, and your word is as good as gold."

"Well and good!" cried Coconnas, "that 's the talk! You are right, sir, a gentleman's word is as good as gold, especially when he has credit at court. Thus, believe me, I did not risk too much when I proposed to play for the first favor we might receive."

"Doubtless, and you might lose it, but I could not gain it; for, as I am with the King of Navarre, I could not receive anything from the Duc de Guise."

"Ah, the heretic!" muttered the landlord as he was at work polishing up his old helmet, "I got on the right scent, did I?" And he stopped his work long enough to cross himself piously.

"Well, then," continued Coconnas, shuffling the cards which the waiter had just brought him, "you are of the" —

"Of the what?"

"Of the new religion."

"I?"

"Yes, you."

"Well, say that I am," said La Mole, with a smile, "have you anything against us?"

"Oh! thank God, no! It is all the same to me. I hate Huguenotry with all my heart, but I do not hate the Huguenots; besides, they are in fashion just now."

"Yes," replied La Mole, smiling; "to wit, the shooting at the admiral with an arquebuse; but supposing we have a game of arquebusades."

"Anything you please," said Coconnas, "provided I get to playing, it is all the same to me."

"Well, let us play, then," said La Mole, picking up his cards and arranging them in his hand.

"Yes, play ahead and with all confidence, for even if I were to lose a hundred crowns of gold against yours I shall have the wherewithal to pay you to-morrow morning."

"Then your fortune will come while you are asleep."

"No; I am going to find it."

"Where? Tell me and I 'll go with you."

"At the Louvre."

"Are you going back there to-night?"

"Yes; to-night I have a private audience with the great Duc de Guise."

As soon as Coconnas began to speak about going to seek his fortune at the Louvre, La Hurière stopped polishing his sallet and went and stood behind La Mole's chair, so that Coconnas alone could see him, and made signs to him, which the Piedmontese, absorbed in his game and the conversation, did not notice.

"Well, it is miraculous," remarked La Mole; "and you were right when you said that we were born under the same star. I have also an appointment at the Louvre to-night, but not with the Duc de Guise; mine is with the King of Navarre."

"Have you a pass-word?"

"Yes."

"A rallying sign?"

"No."

"Well, I have one, and my pass-word is"—

As the Piedmontese was saying these words, La Hurière made such an expressive gesture that the indiscreet gentleman, who happened at that instant to raise his head, paused petri-

fied more by the action than by the turn of the cards which had just caused him to lose three crowns.

La Mole looked around, but saw only his landlord standing behind him with folded arms and wearing on his head the sallet which he had seen him polishing the moment before.

"What is the matter, pray?" inquired La Mole of Coconnas.

Coconnas looked at the landlord and at his companion without answering, for he could make nothing out of Maître La Hurière's redoubled gestures.

La Hurière saw that he must go to his aid:

"It is only that I am very fond of cards myself," said he, speaking rapidly, "and I came closer to see the trick which made you gain, and the gentleman saw me with my war helmet on, and as I am only a poor bourgeois, it surprised him."

"You make a fine figure, indeed you do!" cried La Mole, with a burst of laughter.

"Oh, sir," replied La Hurière with admirably pretended good nature and a shrug of the shoulders expressive of his inferiority, "we poor fellows are not very valiant and our appearance is not elegant. It is all right for you fine gentlemen to wear glittering helmets and carry keen rapiers, and provided we mount guard strictly" —

"Aha!" said La Mole, taking his turn at shuffling the cards. "So you mount guard, do you?"

"*Eh, mon Dieu, oui, Monsieur le Comte!* I am sergeant in a company of citizen militia."

After having said this while La Mole was engaged in dealing the cards, La Hurière withdrew, putting his finger on his lips as a sign of discretion for Coconnas, who was more amazed than ever.

This signal for caution was doubtless the reason that he lost almost as rapidly the second time as the first.

"Well," observed La Mole, "this makes exactly your six crowns. Will you have your revenge on your future fortune?"

"Willingly," replied Coconnas.

"But before you begin, did you not say you had an appointment with the Duc de Guise?"

Coconnas looked toward the kitchen, and saw the great eyes of La Hurière, who was repeating his warning.

"Yes," he replied, "but it is not yet time. But now let us talk a little about yourself, Monsieur de la Mole."

"We should do better, I think, by talking of the game, my

dear Monsieur de Coconnas; for unless I am very much mistaken, I am in a fair way of gaining six more crowns."

"By Heaven! that is true! I always heard that the Huguenots had good luck at cards. Devil take me if I have n't a good mind to turn Huguenot!"

La Hurière's eyes sparkled like two coals; but Coconnas, absorbed in his game, did not notice them. "Do so, count, do so," said La Mole, "and though the way in which the change came about is odd, you will be well received among us."

Coconnas scratched his ear.

"If I were sure that your good luck came from that," he said, "I would; for I really do not stickle so overwhelmingly for the mass, and as the King does not think so much of it either" —

"Then it is such a beautiful religion," said La Mole; "so simple, so pure" —

"And, moreover, it is in fashion," said Coconnas; "and, moreover, it brings good luck at cards; for the devil take me if you do not hold all the aces, and yet I have watched you closely, and you play very fairly; you do not cheat; it must be the religion" —

"You owe me six crowns more," said La Mole, quietly.

"Ah, how you tempt me!" said Coconnas; "and if I am not satisfied with Monsieur de Guise to-night" —

"Well?"

"Well, to-morrow I will ask you to present me to the King of Navarre and, be assured, if once I become a Huguenot, I will out-Huguenot Luther, Calvin, Melanchthon, and all the reformers on earth!"

"Hush!" said La Mole, "you will get into a quarrel with our host."

"Ah, that is true," said Coconnas, looking toward the kitchen; "but — no, he is not listening; he is too much occupied at this moment."

"What is he doing, pray?" inquired La Mole, who could not see him from where he was.

"He is talking with — devil take me! it is he!"

"Who?"

"Why, that night-bird with whom he was discoursing when we arrived. The man in the yellow doublet and drab-colored cloak. By Heaven! how earnestly he talks. Say, Maître La Hurière, are you engaged in politics?"

But this time Maître La Hurière's answer was a gesture so energetic and imperious that in spite of his love for the picture card Coconnas got up and went to him.

"What is the matter with you?" asked La Mole.

"You wish wine, sir?" said La Hurière, seizing Coconnas' hand eagerly. "You shall have it. Grégoire, wine for these gentlemen!"

Then he whispered in his ear:

"Silence, if you value your life, silence! And get rid of your companion."

La Hurière was so pale, the sallow man so lugubrious, that Coconnas felt a shiver run over him, and turning to La Mole said:

"My dear sir, I must beg you to excuse me. I have lost fifty crowns in the turn of a hand I am in bad luck to-night, and I fear I may get into difficulties."

"Well, sir, as you please," replied La Mole; "besides, I shall not be sorry to lie down for a time. Maître la Hurière!"

"Monsieur le Comte?"

"If any one comes for me from the King of Navarre, wake me; I shall be dressed, and consequently ready."

"So shall I," said Coconnas; "and that I may not keep his highness waiting, I will prepare the sign. Maître la Hurière, some white paper and scissors!"

"Grégoire!" cried La Hurière, "white paper to write a letter on and scissors to cut the envelope with."

"Ah!" said the Piedmontese to himself. "Something extraordinary is going on here!"

"Good-night, Monsieur de Coconnas," said La Mole; "and you, landlord, be so good as to light me to my room. Good luck, my friend!" and La Mole disappeared up the winding staircase, followed by La Hurière.

Then the mysterious man, taking Coconnas by the arm, said to him, speaking very rapidly:

"Sir, you have very nearly betrayed a secret on which depends the fate of a kingdom. God saw fit to have you close your mouth in time. One word more, and I should have brought you down with my arquebuse. Now we are alone, fortunately; listen!"

"But who are you that you address me with this tone of authority?"

"Did you ever hear talk of the Sire de Maurevel?"

"The assassin of the admiral?"

"And of Captain de Mouy."

"Yes."

"Well, I am the Sire de Maurevel."

"Oho!" said Coconnas.

"Now listen to me!"

"By Heaven! I assure you I will listen!"

"Hush!" said Maurevel, putting his finger on his mouth.

Coconnas listened.

At that moment he heard the landlord close the door of a chamber, then the door of a corridor, and bolt it. Then he rushed down the stairs to join the two speakers.

He offered a chair to Coconnas, a chair to Maurevel, and took one for himself.

"All is safe now, Monsieur de Maurevel," said he; "you may speak."

It was striking eleven o'clock at Saint Germain l'Auxerrois. Maurevel counted each of the hammer-strokes as they sounded clear and melancholy through the night, and when the last echo had died away in space he turned to Coconnas, who was greatly mystified at seeing the precautions taken by the two men. "Sir," he asked, "are you a good Catholic?"

"Why, I think I am," replied Coconnas.

"Sir," continued Maurevel, "are you devoted to the King?"

"Heart and soul! I even feel that you insult me, sir, in asking such a question."

"We will not quarrel over that; only you are going to follow us."

"Whither?"

"That is of little consequence — put yourself in our hands; your fortune, and perhaps your life, is at stake."

"I tell you, sir, that at midnight I have an appointment at the Louvre."

"That is where we are going."

"Monsieur de Guise is expecting me there."

"And us also."

"But I have a private pass-word," continued Coconnas, somewhat mortified at sharing with the Sire de Maurevel and Maître La Hurière the honor of his audience.

"So have we."

"But I have a sign of recognition."

Maurevel smiled.

Then he drew from beneath his doublet a handful of crosses in white stuff, gave one to La Hurière, one to Coconnas, and took another for himself. La Hurière fastened his to his helmet. Maurevel attached his to the side of his hat.

"Ah," said Coconnas, amazed, "the appointment and the rallying pass-word were for every one?"

"Yes, sir, — that is to say, for all good Catholics."

"Then there is a festival at the Louvre — some royal banquet, is there not?" said Coconnas; "and it is desired to exclude those hounds of Huguenots, — good, capital, excellent! They have been showing off too long."

"Yes, there is to be a festival at the Louvre — a royal banquet; and the Huguenots are invited; and moreover, they will be the heroes of the festival, and will pay for the banquet, and if you will be one of us, we will begin by going to invite their principal champion — their Gideon, as they call him."

"The admiral!" cried Coconnas.

"Yes, the old Gaspard, whom I missed, like a fool, though I aimed at him with the King's arquebuse."

"And this, my gentleman, is why I was polishing my sallet, sharpening my sword, and putting an edge on my knives," said La Hurière, in a harsh voice consonant with war.

At these words Coconnas shuddered and turned very pale, for he began to understand.

"What, really," he exclaimed, "this festival — this banquet is a — you are going" —

"You have been a long time guessing, sir," said Maurevel, "and it is easy to see that you are not so weary of these insolent heretics as we are."

"And you take on yourself," he said, "to go to the admiral's and to" —

Maurevel smiled, and drawing Coconnas to the window he said:

"Look there! — do you see, in the small square at the end of the street, behind the church, a troop drawn up noiselessly in the shadow?"

"Yes."

"The men forming that troop have, like Maître la Hurière, and myself, and yourself, a cross in their hats."

"Well?"

"Well, these men are a company of Swiss, from the smaller

cantons, commanded by Toquenot, — you know the men from the smaller cantons are the King's cronies."

"Oho!" said Coconnas.

"Now look at that troop of horse passing along the Quay — do you recognize their leader?"

"How can I recognize him?" asked Coconnas, with a shudder; "I reached Paris only this evening."

"Well, then, he is the one with whom you have a rendezvous at the Louvre at midnight. See, he is going to wait for you!"

"The Duc de Guise?"

"Himself! His escorts are Marcel, the ex-provost of the tradesmen, and Jean Choron, the present provost. These two are going to summon their companies, and here, down this street comes the captain of the quarter. See what he will do!"

"He knocks at each door; but what is there on the doors at which he knocks?"

"A white cross, young man, such as that which we have in our hats. In days gone by they let God bear the burden of distinguishing his own; now we have grown more civilized and we save him the bother."

"But at each house at which he knocks the door opens and from each house armed citizens come out."

"He will knock here in turn, and we shall in turn go out."

"What," said Coconnas, "every one called out to go and kill one old Huguenot? By Heaven! it is shameful! It is an affair of cut-throats, and not of soldiers."

"Young man," replied Maurevel, "if the old are objectionable to you, you may choose young ones — you will find plenty for all tastes. If you despise daggers, use your sword, for the Huguenots are not the men to allow their throats to be cut without defending themselves, and you know that Huguenots, young or old, are tough."

"But are they all going to be killed, then?" cried Coconnas.

"All!"

"By the King's order?"

"By order of the King and Monsieur de Guise."

"And when?"

"When you hear the bell of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois."

"Oh! so that was why that amiable German attached to the Duc de Guise — what is his name?"

"Monsieur de Besme."

"That is it. That is why Monsieur de Besme told me to hasten at the first sound of the tocsin."

"So then you have seen Monsieur de Besme?"

"I have seen him and spoken to him."

"Where?"

"At the Louvre. He admitted me, gave me the pass-word, gave me"—

"Look there!"

"By Heaven! — there he is himself."

"Would you speak with him?"

"Why, really, I should not object."

Maurevel carefully opened the window; Besme was passing at the moment with twenty soldiers.

"*Guise and Lorraine!*" said Maurevel.

Besme turned round, and perceiving that he himself was addressed, came under the window.

"Oh, is it you, Monsir de Maurefel?"

"Yes, 't is I; what are you looking for?"

"I am looking for de hostelry of de *Belle Étoile*, to find a Monsir Gogonnas."

"Here I am, Monsieur de Besme," said the young man.

"Goot, goot; are you ready?"

"Yes — to do what?"

"Vatefer Monsieur de Maurefel may dell you, for he is a goot Gatolic."

"Do you hear?" inquired Maurevel.

"Yes," replied Coconnas, "but, Monsieur de Besme, where are you going?"

"I?" asked Monsieur de Besme, with a laugh.

"Yes, you."

"I am going to fire off a leedle wort at the admiral."

"Fire off two, if need be," said Maurevel, "and this time, if he gets up at the first, do not let him get up at the second."

"Haf no vear, Monsir de Maurefel, haf no vear, und meanvile get dis yoong mahn on de right drack."

"Don't worry about me: the Coconnas are regular bloodhounds, and I am a chip of the old block."[1]

"Atieu."

"Go on!"

"Unt you?"

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[1] Bons chiens chassent de race.

"Begin the hunt; we shall be at the death."

De Besme went on, and Maurevel closed the window.

"Did you hear, young man?" said Maurevel; "if you have any private enemy, even if he is not altogether a Huguenot, you can put him on your list, and he will pass with the others."

Coconnas, more bewildered than ever with what he saw and heard, looked first at his landlord, who was assuming formidable attitudes, and then at Maurevel, who quietly drew a paper from his pocket.

"Here's my list," said he; "three hundred. Let each good Catholic do this night one-tenth part of the business I shall do, and to-morrow there will not remain one single heretic in the kingdom."

"Hush!" said La Hurière.

"What is it?" inquired Coconnas and Maurevel together.

They heard the first pulsation from the bell in Saint Germain l'Auxerrois.

"The signal!" exclaimed Maurevel. "The time is set forward! I was told it was appointed at midnight — so much the better. When it concerns the interest of God and the King, it is better for clocks to be fast than slow!"

In reality they heard the church bell mournfully tolling.

Then a shot was fired, and almost instantly the light of several torches blazed up like flashes of lightning in the Rue de l'Arbre Sec.

Coconnas passed his hand over his brow, which was damp with perspiration.

"It has begun!" cried Maurevel. "Now to work — away!"

"One moment, one moment!" said the landlord. "Before we begin, let us protect the camp, as we say in the army. I do not wish to have my wife and children's throats cut while I am out. There is a Huguenot here."

"Monsieur de la Mole!" said Coconnas, starting.

"Yes, the heretic has thrown himself into the wolf's throat."

"What!" said Coconnas, "would you attack your guest?"

"I gave an extra edge to my rapier for his special benefit."

"Oho!" said the Piedmontese, frowning.

"I never yet killed anything but my rabbits, ducks, and chickens," replied the worthy inn-keeper, "and I do not know very well how to go to work to kill a man; well, I will practise on him, and if I am clumsy, no one will be there to laugh at me."

"By Heaven! it is hard," said Coconnas. "Monsieur de la Mole is my companion; Monsieur de la Mole has supped with me; Monsieur de la Mole has played with me" —

"Yes; but Monsieur de la Mole is a heretic," said Maurevel. "Monsieur de la Mole is doomed; and if we do not kill him, others will."

"Not to say," added the host, "that he has won fifty crowns from you."

"True," said Coconnas; "but fairly, I am sure."

"Fairly or not, you must pay them, while, if I kill him, you are quits."

"Come, come!" cried Maurevel; "make haste, gentlemen, an arquebuse-shot, a rapier-thrust, a blow with a mallet, a stroke with any weapon you please; but get done with it if you wish to reach the admiral's in time to help Monsieur de Guise as we promised."

Coconnas sighed.

"I 'll make haste!" cried La Hurière, "wait for me."

"By Heaven!" cried Coconnas, "he will put the poor fellow to great pain, and, perhaps, rob him. I must be present to finish him, if requisite, and to prevent any one from touching his money."

And impelled by this happy thought, Coconnas followed La Hurière upstairs, and soon overtook him, for according as the landlord went up, doubtless as the effect of reflection, he slackened his pace.

As he reached the door, Coconnas still following, many gunshots were discharged in the street. Instantly La Mole was heard to leap out of bed and the flooring creaked under his feet.

"*Diable!*" muttered La Hurière, somewhat disconcerted; "that has awakened him, I think."

"It looks like it," observed Coconnas.

"And he will defend himself."

"He is capable of it. Suppose, now, Maître la Hurière, he were to kill you; that would be droll!"

"Hum, hum!" responded the landlord, but knowing himself to be armed with a good arquebuse, he took courage and dashed the door in with a vigorous kick.

La Mole, without his hat, but dressed, was entrenched behind his bed, his sword between his teeth, and his pistols in his hands.

"Oho!" said Coconnas, his nostrils expanding as if he had been a wild beast smelling blood, "this grows interesting, Maître la Hurière. Forward!"

"Ah, you would assassinate me, it seems!" cried La Mole, with glaring eyes; "and it is you, wretch!"

Maître la Hurière's reply to this was to take aim at the young man with his arquebuse; but La Mole was on his guard, and as he fired, fell on his knees, and the ball flew over his head.

"Help!" cried La Mole; "help, Monsieur de Coconnas!"

"Help, Monsieur de Maurevel! — help!" cried La Hurière.

"*Ma foi!* Monsieur de la Mole," replied Coconnas, "all I can do in this affair is not to join the attack against you. It seems all the Huguenots are to be put to death to-night, in the King's name. Get out of it as well as you can."

"Ah, traitors! assassins! — is it so? Well, then, take this!" and La Mole, aiming in his turn, fired one of his pistols. La Hurière, who had kept his eye on him, dodged to one side; but Coconnas, not anticipating such a reply, stayed where he was, and the bullet grazed his shoulder.

"By Heaven!" he exclaimed, grinding his teeth; "I have it. Well, then, let it be we two, since you will have it so!"

And drawing his rapier, he rushed on La Mole.

Had he been alone La Mole would, doubtless, have awaited his attack; but Coconnas had La Hurière to aid him, who was reloading his gun, and Maurevel, who, responding to the innkeeper's invitation, was rushing up-stairs four steps at a time.

La Mole, therefore, dashed into a small closet, which he bolted inside.

"Ah, coward!" cried Coconnas, furious, and striking at the door with the pommel of his sword; "wait! wait! and I will make as many holes in your body as you have gained crowns of me to-night. I came up to prevent you from suffering! Oh, I came up to prevent you from being robbed and you pay me back by putting a bullet into my shoulder! Wait for me, coward, wait!"

While this was going on, Maître la Hurière came up and with one blow with the butt-end of his arquebuse smashed in the door.

Coconnas darted into the closet, but only bare walls met him. The closet was empty and the window was open.

"He must have jumped out," said the landlord, "and as we are on the fourth story, he is surely dead."

"Or he has escaped by the roof of the next house," said Coconnas, putting his leg on the window-sill and preparing to follow him over this narrow and slippery route; but Maurevel and La Hurière seized him and drew him back into the room.

"Are you mad?" they both exclaimed at once; "you will kill yourself!'

"Bah!" said Coconnas, "I am a mountaineer, and used to climbing glaciers; besides, when a man has once offended me, I would go up to heaven or descend to hell with him, by whatever route he pleases. Let me do as I wish."

"Well," said Maurevel, "he is either dead or a long way off by this time. Come with us; and if he escape you, you will find a thousand others to take his place."

"You are right," cried Coconnas. "Death to the Huguenots! I want revenge, and the sooner the better."

And the three rushed down the staircase, like an avalanche.

"To the admiral's!" shouted Maurevel.

"To the admiral's!" echoed La Hurière.

"To the admiral's, then, if it must be so!" cried Coconnas in his turn.

And all three, leaving the *Belle Étoile* in charge of Grégoire and the other waiters, hastened toward the admiral's hôtel in the Rue de Béthizy; a bright light and the report of firearms guided them in that direction.

"Ah, who comes here?" cried Coconnas. "A man without his doublet or scarf!"

"It is some one escaping," said Maurevel.

"Fire! fire!" said Coconnas; "you who have arquebuses."

"Faith, not I," replied Maurevel. "I keep my powder for better game."

"You, then, La Hurière!"

"Wait, wait!" said the innkeeper, taking aim.

"Oh, yes, wait," cried Coconnas, "and meantime he will escape."

And he rushed after the unhappy wretch, whom he soon overtook, as he was wounded; but at the moment when, in order that he might not strike him behind, he exclaimed, "Turn, will you! turn!" the report of an arquebuse was heard, a bullet whistled by Coconnas's ears, and the fugitive rolled

over, like a hare in its swiftest flight struck by the shot of the sportsman.

A cry of triumph was heard behind Coconnas. The Piedmontese turned round and saw La Hurière brandishing his weapon.

"Ah," he exclaimed, "I have handselled this time at any rate."

"And only just missed making a hole quite through me."

"Be on your guard! — be on your guard!" cried La Hurière.

Coconnas sprung back. The wounded man had risen on his knee, and, eager for revenge, was just on the point of stabbing him with his poniard, when the landlord's warning put the Piedmontese on his guard.

"Ah, viper!" shouted Coconnas; and rushing at the wounded man, he thrust his sword through him three times up to the hilt.

"And now," cried he, leaving the Huguenot in the agonies of death, "to the admiral's! — to the admiral's!"

"Aha! my gentlemen," said Maurevel, "it seems to work."

"Faith! yes," replied Coconnas. "I do not know if it is the smell of gunpowder makes me drunk, or the sight of blood excites me, but by Heaven! I am thirsty for slaughter. It is like a battue of men. I have as yet only had battues of bears and wolves, and on my honor, a battue of men seems more amusing."

And the three went on their way.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MASSACRE.

The hôtel occupied by the admiral, as we have said, was situated in the Rue de Béthizy. It was a great mansion at the rear of a court and had two wings giving on the street. A wall furnished with a large gate and two small grilled doors stretched from wing to wing.

When our three Guisards reached the end of the Rue de Béthizy, which is a continuation of the Rue des Fossés Saint Germain l'Auxerrois, they saw the hôtel surrounded by Swiss,

by soldiers, and by armed citizens; every one had in his right hand either a sword or a pike or an arquebuse, and some held in their left hands torches, shedding over the scene a fitful and melancholy glare which, according as the throng moved, shifted along the street, climbed the walls, or spread over that living sea where every weapon cast its answering flash.

All around the hôtel and in the Rues Tirechappe, Étienne, and Bertin Poirée the terrible work was proceeding. Long shouts were heard, there was an incessant rattle of musketry, and from time to time some wretch, half naked, pale, and drenched in blood, leaped like a hunted stag into the circle of lugubrious light where a host of fiends seemed to be at work.

In an instant Coconnas, Maurevel, and La Hurière, accredited by their white crosses, and received with cries of welcome, were in the thickest of this struggling, panting mob. Doubtless they would not have been able to advance had not some of the throng recognized Maurevel and made way for him. Coconnas and La Hurière followed him closely and the three therefore contrived to get into the court-yard.

In the centre of this court-yard, the three doors of which had been burst open, a man, around whom the assassins formed a respectful circle, stood leaning on his drawn rapier, and eagerly looking up at a balcony about fifteen feet above him, and extending in front of the principal window of the hôtel.

This man stamped impatiently on the ground, and from time to time questioned those that were nearest to him.

"Nothing yet!" murmured he. "No one! — he must have been warned and has escaped. What do you think, Du Gast?"

"Impossible, monseigneur."

"Why? Did you not tell me that just before we arrived a man, bare-headed, a drawn sword in his hand, came running, as if pursued, knocked at the door, and was admitted?"

"Yes, monseigneur; but M. de Besme came up immediately, the gates were shattered, and the hôtel was surrounded."

"The man went in sure enough, but he has not gone out."

"Why," said Coconnas to La Hurière, "if my eyes do not deceive me, I see Monsieur de Guise."

"You do see him, sir. Yes; the great Henry de Guise is come in person to watch for the admiral and serve him as he served the duke's father. Every one has his day, and it is our turn now."

"Holà, Besme, holà!" cried the duke, in his powerful voice, "have you not finished yet?"

And he struck his sword so forcibly against the stones that sparks flew out.

At this instant shouts were heard in the hôtel — then several shots — then a great shuffling of feet and a clashing of swords, and then all was again silent.

The duke was about to rush into the house.

"Monseigneur, monseigneur!" said Du Gast, detaining him, "your dignity commands you to wait here."

"You are right, Du Gast. I must stay here; but I am dying with impatience and anxiety. If he were to escape me!"

Suddenly the noise of feet came nearer — the windows of the first floor were lighted up with what seemed the reflection of a conflagration.

The window, to which the duke's eyes had been so many times lifted, opened, or, rather, was shattered to pieces, and a man, his pale face and white neck stained with blood, appeared on the balcony.

"Ah! at last, Besme!" cried the duke; "speak! speak!"

"Louk! louk!" replied the German coldly, and stooping down he lifted up something which seemed like a heavy body.

"But where are the others?" asked the duke, impatiently, "where are the others?"

"De udders are vinishing de udders!"

"And what have you done?"

"Vait! You shall peholt! Shtant pack a liddle."

The duke fell back a step.

At that instant the object Besme was dragging toward him with such effort became visible.

It was the body of an old man.

He lifted it above the balcony, held it suspended an instant, and then flung it down at his master's feet.

The heavy thud, the billows of blood spurting from the body and spattering the pavement all around, filled even the duke himself with horror; but this feeling lasted only an instant, and curiosity caused every one to crowd forward, so that the glare of the torches flickered on the victim's body.

They could see a white beard, a venerable face, and limbs contracted by death.

"The admiral!" cried twenty voices, as instantaneously hushed.

"Yes, the admiral, here he is!" said the duke, approaching the corpse, and contemplating it with silent ecstasy.

"The admiral! the admiral!" repeated the witnesses of this terrible scene, crowding together and timidly approaching the old man, majestic even in death.

"Ah, at last, Gaspard!" said the Duke de Guise, triumphantly. "Murderer of my father! thus do I avenge him!"

And the duke dared to plant his foot on the breast of the Protestant hero.

But instantly the dying warrior opened his eyes, his bleeding and mutilated hand was clinched for the last time, and the admiral, though without stirring, said to the duke in a sepulchral voice:

"Henry de Guise, some day the assassin's foot shall be felt on your breast. I did not kill your father. A curse upon you."

The duke, pale, and trembling in spite of himself, felt a cold shudder come over him. He passed his hand across his brow, as if to dispel the fearful vision; when he dared again to glance at the admiral his eyes were closed, his hand unclinched, and a stream of black blood was flowing from the mouth which had just pronounced such terrible words.

The duke raised his sword with a gesture of desperate resolution.

"Vell, monsir, are you gondent?"

"Yes, my worthy friend, yes, for you have revenged" —

"The Dugue François, haf I not?"

"Our religion," replied Henry, in a solemn voice. "And now," he went on, addressing the Swiss, the soldiers, and citizens who filled the court and street, "to work, my friends, to work!"

"Good evening, M. de Besme," said Coconnas with a sort of admiration, approaching the German, who still stood on the balcony, calmly wiping his sword.

"So you settled him, did you?" cried La Hurière; "how did you manage it?"

"Oh, zimbly, zimbly; he haf heerd de gommotion, he haf oben de door unt I joost brick my rabier troo his potty. But I tink dey am gilling Téligny now. I hear his gries!"

At that instant, in fact, several shrieks, apparently uttered by a woman in distress, were heard; the windows of the long gallery which formed a wing of the hotel were lighted up with

a red glare; two men were seen fleeing, pursued by a long line of assassins. An arquebuse-shot killed one; the other, finding an open window directly in his way, without stopping to look at the distance from the ground, sprang boldly into the court-yard below, heeding not the enemies who awaited him there.

"Kill! kill!" cried the assassins, seeing their prey about to escape them.

The fugitive picked up his sword, which as he stumbled had fallen from his hand, dashed headlong through the soldiers, upset three or four, ran one through the body, and amid the pistol-shots and curses of the soldiers, rendered furious because they had missed him, darted like lightning in front of Coconnas, who was waiting for him at the gate with his poniard in his hand.

"Touched!" cried the Piedmontese, piercing his arm with his keen, delicate blade.

"Coward!" replied the fugitive, striking his enemy in the face with the flat of his weapon, for want of room to thrust at him with its point.

"A thousand devils!" cried Coconnas; "it's Monsieur de la Mole!"

"Monsieur de la Mole!" reëchoed La Hurière and Maurevel.

"He is the one who warned the admiral!" cried several soldiers.

"Kill him — kill him!" was shouted on all sides.

Coconnas, La Hurière, and a dozen soldiers rushed in pursuit of La Mole, who, covered with blood, and having attained that state of exaltation which is the last resource of human strength, dashed through the streets, with no other guide than instinct. Behind him, the footsteps and shouts of his enemies spurred him on and seemed to give him wings. Occasionally a bullet would whistle by his ears and suddenly add new swiftness to his flight just as it was beginning to slacken. He no longer breathed; it was not breath, but a dull rattle, a hoarse panting, that came from his chest. Perspiration and blood wet his locks and ran together down his face.

His doublet soon became too oppressive for the beating of his heart and he tore it off. Soon his sword became too heavy for his hand and he flung it far away. Sometimes it seemed to him that the footsteps of his pursuers were farther off and that he was about to escape them; but in response to their shouts, other murderers who were along his path and nearer to

him left off their bloody occupations and started in pursuit of him.

Suddenly he caught sight of the river flowing silently at his left; it seemed to him that he should feel, like a stag at bay, an ineffable pleasure in plunging into it, and only the supreme power of reason could restrain him.

On his right was the Louvre, dark and motionless, but full of strange and ominous sounds; soldiers on the drawbridge came and went, and helmets and cuirasses glittered in the moonlight. La Mole thought of the King of Navarre, as he had before thought of Coligny; they were his only protectors. He collected all his strength, and inwardly vowing to abjure his faith should he escape the massacre, by making a detour of a score or two of yards he misled the mob pursuing him, darted straight for the Louvre, leaped upon the drawbridge among the soldiers, received another poniard stab which grazed his side, and despite the cries of "Kill — kill!" which resounded on all sides, and the opposing weapons of the sentinels, darted like an arrow through the court, into the vestibule, mounted the staircase, then up two stories higher, recognized a door, and leaning against it, struck it violently with his hands and feet.

"Who is there?" asked a woman's voice.

"Oh, my God!" murmured La Mole; "they are coming, I hear them; 't is I — 't is I!"

"Who are you?" said the voice.

La Mole recollected the pass-word.

"Navarre — Navarre!" cried he.

The door instantly opened. La Mole, without thanking, without even seeing Gillonne, dashed into the vestibule, then along a corridor, through two or three chambers, until at last he entered a room lighted by a lamp suspended from the ceiling.

Behind curtains of velvet with gold fleurs-de-lis, in a bed of carved oak, a lady, half naked, leaning on her arm, stared at him with eyes wide open with terror.

La Mole sprang toward her.

"Madame," cried he, "they are killing, they are butchering my brothers — they seek to kill me, to butcher me also! Ah! you are the queen — save me!"

And he threw himself at her feet, leaving on the carpet a large track of blood.

At the sight of a man pale, exhausted, and bleeding at her feet, the Queen of Navarre started up in terror, hid her face in her hands, and called for help.

"Madame," cried La Mole, endeavoring to rise, "in the name of Heaven do not call, for if you are heard I am lost! Assassins are in my track — they are rushing up the stairs behind me. I hear them — there they are! there they are!"

"Help!" cried the queen, beside herself, "help!"

"Ah!" said La Mole, despairingly, "you have killed me. To die by so sweet a voice, so fair a hand! I did not think it possible."

At the same time the door flew open, and a troop of men, their faces covered with blood and blackened with powder, their swords drawn, and their pikes and arquebuses levelled, rushed into the apartment.

Coconnas was at their head — his red hair bristling, his pale blue eyes extraordinarily dilated, his cheek cut open by La Mole's sword, which had ploughed its bloody furrow there. Thus disfigured, the Piedmontese was terrible to behold.

"By Heaven!" he cried, "there he is! there he is! Ah! this time we have him at last!"

La Mole looked round him for a weapon, but in vain; he glanced at the queen, and saw the deepest pity depicted in her face; then he felt that she alone could save him; he threw his arms round her.

Coconnas advanced, and with the point of his long rapier again wounded his enemy's shoulder, and the crimson drops of warm blood stained the white and perfumed sheets of Marguerite's couch.

Marguerite saw the blood flow; she felt the shudder that ran through La Mole's frame; she threw herself with him into the recess between the bed and the wall. It was time, for La Mole, whose strength was exhausted, was incapable of flight or resistance; he leaned his pallid head on Marguerite's shoulder, and his hand convulsively seized and tore the thin embroidered cambric which enveloped Marguerite's body in a billow of gauze.

"Oh, madame," murmured he, in a dying voice, "save me."

He could say no more. A mist like the darkness of death came over his eyes, his head sunk back, his arms fell at his side, his legs gave way, and he sank on the floor, bathed in his blood, and dragging the queen with him.

At this moment Coconnas, excited by the shouts, intoxicated by the sight of blood, and exasperated by the long chase, advanced toward the recess; in another instant his sword would have pierced La Mole's heart, and perhaps Marguerite's also.

At the sight of the bare steel, and even more moved at such brutal insolence, the daughter of kings drew herself up to her full stature and uttered such a shriek of terror, indignation, and rage that the Piedmontese stood petrified by an unknown feeling; and yet undoubtedly had this scene been prolonged and no other actor taken part in it, his feeling would have vanished like a morning snow under an April sun. But suddenly a secret door in the wall opened, and a pale young man of sixteen or seventeen, dressed in black and with his hair in disorder, rushed in.

"Wait, sister!" he cried; "here I am, here I am!"

"François! François!" cried Marguerite; "help! help!"

"The Duc d'Alençon!" murmured La Hurière, grounding his arquebuse.

"By Heaven! a son of France!" growled Coconnas, drawing back.

The duke glanced round him. He saw Marguerite, dishevelled, more lovely than ever, leaning against the wall, surrounded by men, fury in their eyes, sweat on their foreheads, and foam in their mouths.

"Wretches!" cried he.

"Save me, brother!" shrieked Marguerite. "They are going to kill me!"

A flame flashed across the duke's pallid face.

He was unarmed, but sustained, no doubt, by the consciousness of his rank, he advanced with clinched fists toward Coconnas and his companions, who retreated, terrified at the lightning darting from his eyes.

"Ha! and will you murder a son of France, too?" cried the duke. Then, as they recoiled, — "Ho, there! captain of the guard! Hang every one of these ruffians!"

More alarmed at the sight of this weaponless young man than he would have been at the aspect of a regiment of reiters or lansquenets, Coconnas had already reached the door. La Hurière was leaping downstairs like a deer, and the soldiers were jostling and pushing one another in the vestibule in their endeavors to escape, finding the door far too small for their great desire to be outside it. Meantime Marguerite

had instinctively thrown the damask coverlid of her bed over La Mole, and withdrawn from him.

When the last murderer had departed the Duc d'Alençon came back:

"Sister," he cried, seeing Marguerite all dabbled with blood, "are you wounded?" And he sprang toward his sister with a solicitude which would have done credit to his affection if he had not been charged with harboring too deep an affection for a brother to entertain for a sister.

"No," said she; "I think not, or, if so, very slightly."

"But this blood," said the duke, running his trembling hands all over Marguerite's body. "Where does it come from?"

"I know not," replied she; "one of those wretches laid his hand on me, and perhaps he was wounded."

"What!" cried the duke, "he dared to touch my sister? Oh, if you had only pointed him out to me, if you had told me which one it was, if I knew where to find him" —

"Hush!" said Marguerite.

"And why?" asked François.

"Because if you were seen at this time of night in my room" —

"Can't a brother visit his sister, Marguerite?"

The queen gave the duke a look so keen and yet so threatening that the young man drew back.

"Yes, yes, Marguerite," said he, "you are right, I will go to my room; but you cannot remain alone this dreadful night. Shall I call Gillonne?"

"No, no! leave me, François — leave me. Go by the way you came!"

The young prince obeyed; and hardly had he disappeared when Marguerite, hearing a sigh from behind her bed, hurriedly bolted the door of the secret passage, and then hastening to the other entrance closed it in the same way, just as a troop of archers and soldiers like a hurricane dashed by in hot chase of some other Huguenot residents in the Louvre.

After glancing round to assure herself that she was really alone, she again went to the "ruelle" of her bed, lifted the damask covering which had concealed La Mole from the Duc d'Alençon, and drawing the apparently lifeless body, by great exertion, into the middle of the room, and finding that the victim still breathed, sat down, placed his head on her knees, and sprinkled his face with water.

Then as the water cleared away the mask of blood, dust, and gunpowder which had covered his face, Marguerite recognized the handsome cavalier who, full of life and hope, had three or four hours before come to ask her to look out for his interests with her protection and that of the King of Navarre; and had gone away, dazzled by her beauty, leaving her also impressed by his.

Marguerite uttered a cry of terror, for now what she felt for the wounded man was more than mere pity — it was interest. He was no longer a mere stranger: he was almost an acquaintance. By her care La Mole's fine features soon reappeared, free from stain, but pale and distorted by pain. A shudder ran through her whole frame as she tremblingly placed her hand on his heart. It was still beating. Then she took a smelling-bottle from the table, and applied it to his nostrils.

La Mole opened his eyes.

"Oh! *mon Dieu!*" murmured he; "where am I?"

"Saved!" said Marguerite. "Reassure yourself — you are saved."

La Mole turned his eyes on the queen, gazed earnestly for a moment, and murmured,

"Oh, how beautiful you are!"

Then as if the vision were too much for him, he closed his lids and drew a sigh.

Marguerite started. He had become still paler than before, if that were possible, and for an instant that sigh was his last.

"Oh, my God! my God!" she ejaculated, "have pity on him!"

At this moment a violent knocking was heard at the door. Marguerite half raised herself, still supporting La Mole.

"Who is there?" she cried.

"Madame, it is I — it is I," replied a woman's voice, "the Duchesse de Nevers."

"Henriette!" cried Marguerite. "There is no danger; it is a friend of mine! Do you hear, sir?"

La Mole with some effort got up on one knee.

"Try to support yourself while I go and open the door," said the queen.

La Mole rested his hand on the floor and succeeded in holding himself upright.

Marguerite took one step toward the door, but suddenly stopped, shivering with terror.

"Ah, you are not alone!" she said, hearing the clash of arms outside.

"No, I have twelve guards which my brother-in-law, Monsieur de Guise, assigned me."

"Monsieur de Guise!" murmured La Mole. "The assassin — the assassin!"

"Silence!" said Marguerite. "Not a word!"

And she looked round to see where she could conceal the wounded man.

"A sword! a dagger!" muttered La Mole.

"To defend yourself — useless! Did you not hear? There are twelve of them, and you are alone."

"Not to defend myself, but that I may not fall alive into their hands."

"No, no!" said Marguerite. "No, I will save you. Ah! this cabinet! Come! come."

La Mole made an effort, and, supported by Marguerite, dragged himself to the cabinet. Marguerite locked the door upon him, and hid the key in her alms-purse.

"Not a cry, not a groan, not a sigh," whispered she, through the panelling, "and you are saved."

Then hastily throwing a night-robe over her shoulders, she opened the door for her friend, who tenderly embraced her.

"Ah!" cried Madame Nevers, "then nothing has happened to you, madame!"

"No, nothing at all," replied Marguerite, wrapping the mantle still more closely round her to conceal the spots of blood on her peignoir.

"'T is well. However, as Monsieur de Guise has given me twelve of his guards to escort me to his hôtel, and as I do not need such a large company, I am going to leave six with your majesty. Six of the duke's guards are worth a regiment of the King's to-night."

Marguerite dared not refuse; she placed the soldiers in the corridor, and embraced the duchess, who then returned to the Hôtel de Guise, where she resided in her husband's absence.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MURDERERS.

Coconnas had not fled, he had retreated; La Hurière had not fled, he had flown. The one had disappeared like a tiger, the other like a wolf.

The consequence was that La Hurière had already reached the Place Saint Germain l'Auxerrois when Coconnas was only just leaving the Louvre.

La Hurière, finding himself alone with his arquebuse, while around him men were running, bullets were whistling, and bodies were falling from windows, — some whole, others dismembered, — began to be afraid and was prudently thinking of returning to his tavern, but as he turned into the Rue de l'Arbre Sec from the Rue d'Averon he fell in with a troop of Swiss and light cavalry: it was the one commanded by Maurevel.

"Well," cried Maurevel, who had christened himself with the nickname of King's Killer, "have you finished so soon? Are you going back to your tavern, worthy landlord? And what the devil have you done with our Piedmontese gentleman? No misfortune has happened to him? That would be a shame, for he started out well."

"No, I think not," replied La Hurière; "I hope he will rejoin us!"

"Where have you been?"

"At the Louvre, and I must say we were very rudely treated there."

"By whom?"

"Monsieur le Duc d'Alençon. Isn't he interested in this affair?"

"Monseigneur le Duc d'Alençon is not interested in anything which does not concern himself personally. Propose to treat his two older brothers as Huguenots and he would be in it — provided only that the work should be done without compromising him. But won't you go with these worthy fellows, Maître La Hurière?"

"And where are they going?"

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* Rue Montorgueil; there is a Huguenot

minister there whom I know; he has a wife and six children. These heretics are enormous breeders; it will be interesting."

"And where are you going?"

"Oh, I have a little private business."

"Say, there! don't go off without me," said a voice which made Maurevel start, "you know all the good places and I want to have my share."

"Ah! it is our Piedmontese," said Maurevel.

"Yes, it is Monsieur de Coconnas," said La Hurière; "I thought you were following me."

"Hang it! you made off too swiftly for that; and besides I turned a little to one side so as to fling into the river a frightful child who was screaming, 'Down with the Papists! Long live the admiral!' Unfortunately, I believe the little rascal knew how to swim. These miserable heretics must be flung into the water like cats before their eyes are opened if they are to be drowned at all."

"Ah! you say you are just from the Louvre; so your Huguenot took refuge there, did he?" asked Maurevel.

"*Mon Dieu!* yes."

"I gave him a pistol-shot at the moment when he was picking up his sword in the admiral's court-yard, but I somehow or other missed him."

"Well, I did not miss him," added Coconnas; "I gave him such a thrust in the back that my sword was wet five inches up the blade. Besides, I saw him fall into the arms of Madame Marguerite, a pretty woman, by Heaven! yet I confess I should not be sorry to hear he was really dead; the vagabond is infernally spiteful, and capable of bearing me a grudge all his life. But did n't you say you were bound somewhere?"

"Why, do you mean to go with me?"

"I do not like standing still, by Heaven! I have killed only three or four as yet, and when I get cold my shoulder pains me. Forward! forward!"

"Captain," said Maurevel to the commander of the troop, "give me three men, and go and despatch your parson with the rest."

Three Swiss stepped forward and joined Maurevel. Nevertheless, the two companies proceeded side by side till they reached the top of the Rue Tirechappe; there the light horse and the Swiss took the Rue de la Tonnellerie, while Maurevel, Coconnas, La Hurière, and his three men were proceeding down

the Rue Trousse Vache and entering the Rue Sainte Avoye. "Where the devil are you taking us?" asked Coconnas, who was beginning to be bored by this long march from which he could see no results.

"I am taking you on an expedition at once brilliant and useful. Next to the admiral, next to Téligny, next to the Huguenot princes, I could offer you nothing better. So have patience, our business calls us to the Rue du Chaume, and we shall be there in a second."

"Tell me," said Coconnas, "is not the Rue du Chaume near the Temple?"

"Yes, why?"

"Because an old creditor of our family lives there, one Lambert Mercandon, to whom my father wished me to hand over a hundred rose nobles I have in my pocket for that purpose."

"Well," replied Maurevel, "this is a good opportunity for paying it. This is the day for settling old accounts. Is your Mercandon a Huguenot?"

"Oho, I understand!" said Coconnas; "he must be"—

"Hush! here we are."

"What is that large hôtel, with its entrance in the street?"

"The Hôtel de Guise."

"Truly," returned Coconnas, "I should not have failed to come here, as I am under the patronage of the great Henry. But, by Heaven! all is so very quiet in this quarter, we scarcely hear any firing, and we might fancy ourselves in the country. The devil fetch me but every one is asleep!"

And indeed the Hôtel de Guise seemed as quiet as in ordinary times. All the windows were closed, and a solitary light was burning behind the blind of the principal window over the entrance which had attracted Coconnas's attention as soon as they entered the street.

Just beyond the Hôtel de Guise, in other words, at the corner of the Rue du Petit Chantier and the Rue des Quatre Fils, Maurevel halted.

"Here is the house of the man we want," said he.

"Of the man you want — that is to say" — observed La Hurière.

"Since you are with me we want him."

"What! that house which seems so sound asleep" —

"Exactly! La Hurière, now go and make practical use of

the plausible face which heaven, by some blunder, gave you, and knock at that house. Hand your arquebuse to M. de Coconnas, who has been ogling it this last half hour. If you are admitted, you must ask to speak to Seigneur de Mouy."

"Aha!" exclaimed Coconnas; "now I understand — you also have a creditor in the quarter of the Temple, it would seem."

"Exactly so!" responded Maurevel. "You will go up to him pretending to be a Huguenot, and inform De Mouy of all that has taken place; he is brave, and will come down."

"And once down?" asked La Hurière.

"Once down, I will beg of him to cross swords with me."

"On my soul, 't is a fine gentleman's," said Coconnas, "and I propose to do exactly the same thing with Lambert Mercandon; and if he is too old to respond, I will try it with one of his sons or nephews."

La Hurière, without making any reply, went and knocked at the door, and the sounds echoing in the silence of the night caused the doors of the Hôtel de Guise to open, and several heads to make their appearance from out them; it was evident that the hôtel was quiet after the manner of citadels, that is to say, because it was filled with soldiers.

The heads were almost instantly withdrawn, as doubtless an inkling of the matter in hand was divined.

"Does your Monsieur de Mouy live here?" inquired Coconnas, pointing to the house at which La Hurière was still knocking.

"No, but his mistress does."

"By Heaven! how gallant you are, to give him an occasion to draw sword in the presence of his lady-love! We shall be the judges of the field. However, I should like very well to fight myself — my shoulder burns."

"And your face," added Maurevel, "is considerably damaged."

Coconnas uttered a kind of growl.

"By Heaven!" he said, "I hope he is dead; if I thought not, I would return to the Louvre and finish him."

La Hurière still kept knocking.

Soon the window on the first floor opened, and a man appeared in the balcony, in a nightcap and drawers, and unarmed.

"Who 's there?" cried he.

Maurevel made a sign to the Swiss, who retreated into a corner, whilst Coconnas stood close against the wall.

"Ah! Monsieur de Mouy!" said the innkeeper, in his blandest tones, "is that you?"

"Yes; what then?"

"It is he!" said Maurevel, with a thrill of joy.

"Why, sir," continued La Hurière, "do you not know what is going on? They are murdering the admiral, and massacring all of our religion. Hasten to their assistance; come!"

"Ah!" exclaimed De Mouy, "I feared something was plotted for this night. I ought not to have deserted my worthy comrades. I will come, my friend, — wait for me."

And without closing the window, through which a frightened woman could be heard uttering lamentations and tender entreaties, Monsieur de Mouy got his doublet, his mantle, and his weapons.

"He is coming down! He is coming down!" muttered Maurevel, pale with joy. "Attention, the rest of you!" he whispered to the Swiss.

Then taking the arquebuse from Coconnas he blew on the tinder to make sure that it was still alight.

"Here, La Hurière," he added, addressing the innkeeper, who had rejoined the main body of the company, "here, take your arquebuse!"

"By Heaven!" exclaimed Coconnas, "the moon is coming out of the clouds to witness this beautiful fight. I would give a great deal if Lambert Mercandon were here, to serve as Monsieur de Mouy's second."

"Wait, wait!" said Maurevel; "Monsieur de Mouy alone is equal to a dozen men, and it is likely that we six shall have enough to do to despatch him. Forward, my men!" continued Maurevel, making a sign to the Swiss to stand by the door, in order to strike De Mouy as he came forth.

"Oho!" said Coconnas, as he watched these arrangements; "it appears that this will not come off quite as I expected."

Already the noise made by De Mouy in withdrawing the bar was heard. The Swiss had left their hiding-place to arrange themselves near the door, Maurevel and La Hurière were going forward on tip-toe, and Coconnas with a dying gleam of gentlemanly feeling was standing where he was, when the young woman who had been for the moment utterly forgotten suddenly appeared on the balcony and uttered a

terrible shriek at the sight of the Swiss, Maurevel, and La Hurière.

De Mouy, who had already half opened the door, paused.

"Come back! come back!" cried the young woman. "I see swords glitter, and the match of an arquebuse — there is treachery!"

"Oho!" said the young man; "let us see, then, what all this means."

And he closed the door, replaced the bar, and went upstairs again.

Maurevel's order of battle was changed as soon as he saw that De Mouy was not going to come out. The Swiss went and posted themselves at the other corner of the street, and La Hurière, with his arquebuse in his hand, waited till the enemy reappeared at the window.

He did not wait long. De Mouy came forward holding before him two pistols of such respectable length that La Hurière, who was already aiming, suddenly reflected that the Huguenot's bullets had no farther to fly in reaching the street from the balcony than his had in reaching the balcony.

"Assuredly," said he to himself, "I may kill this gentleman, but likewise this gentleman may kill me in the same way."

Now as Maître La Hurière, an innkeeper by profession, was only accidentally a soldier, this reflection determined him to retreat and seek shelter in the corner of the Rue de Braque, far enough away to cause him some difficulty in finding with a certain certainty, especially at night, the line which a bullet from his arquebuse would take in reaching De Mouy.

De Mouy cast a glance around him, and advanced cautiously like a man preparing to fight a duel; but seeing nothing, he exclaimed:

"Why, it appears, my worthy informant, that you have forgotten your arquebuse at my door! Here I am. What do you want with me?"

"Aha!" said Coconnas to himself; "he is certainly a brave fellow!"

"Well," continued De Mouy, "friends or enemies, whichever you are, do you not see I am waiting?"

La Hurière kept silence, Maurevel made no reply, and the three Swiss remained in covert.

Coconnas waited an instant; then, seeing that no one took

part in the conversation begun by La Hurière and continued by De Mouy, he left his station, and advancing into the middle of the street, took off his hat and said:

"Sir, we are not here for an assassination, as you seem to suppose, but for a duel. I am here with one of your enemies, who was desirous of meeting you to end gallantly an old controversy. Eh, by Heaven! come forward, Monsieur de Maurevel, instead of turning your back. The gentleman accepts."

"Maurevel!" cried De Mouy; "Maurevel, the assassin of my father! Maurevel, the king's assassin! Ah, by Heaven! Yes, I accept."

And taking aim at Maurevel, who was about to knock at the Hôtel de Guise to request a reinforcement, he sent a bullet through his hat.

At the noise of the report and Maurevel's shouts, the guard which had escorted the Duchesse de Nevers came out, accompanied by three or four gentlemen, followed by their pages, and approached the house of young De Mouy's mistress.

A second pistol-shot, fired into the midst of the troop, killed the soldier next to Maurevel; after which De Mouy, finding himself weaponless, or at least with useless weapons, for his pistols had been fired and his adversaries were beyond the reach of his sword, took shelter behind the balcony gallery.

Meantime here and there windows began to be thrown open in the neighborhood, and according to the pacific or bellicose dispositions of their inhabitants, were barricaded or bristled with muskets and arquebuses.

"Help! my worthy Mercandon," shouted De Mouy, beckoning to an elderly man who, from a window which had just been thrown open in front of the Hôtel de Guise, was trying to make out the cause of the confusion.

"Is it you who call, Sire de Mouy?" cried the old man: "are they attacking you?"

"Me — you — all the Protestants; and wait — there is the proof!"

That moment De Mouy had seen La Hurière aim his arquebuse at him; it was fired; but the young man had time to stoop, and the ball broke a window above his head.

"Mercandon!" exclaimed Coconnas, who, in his delight at sight of this fray, had forgotten his creditor, but was reminded of him by De Mouy's apostrophe; "Mercandon, Rue du

Chaume — that is it! Ah, he lives there! Good! Each of us will settle accounts with our man."

And, while the people from the Hôtel de Guise were breaking in the doors of De Mouy's house, and Maurevel, with a torch in his hand, was trying to set it on fire — while now that the doors were once broken, there was a fearful struggle with a single antagonist who at each rapier-thrust brought down his foe — Coconnas tried, by the help of a paving-stone, to break in Mercandon's door, and the latter, unmoved by this solitary effort, was doing his best with his arquebuse out of his window.

And now all this dark and deserted quarter was lighted up, as if by open day, — peopled like the interior of an ant-hive; for from the Hôtel de Montmorency six or eight Huguenot gentlemen, with their servants and friends, had just made a furious charge, and, supported by the firing from the windows, were beginning to repulse Maurevel's and the De Guises' force, who at length were driven back to the place whence they had come.

Coconnas, who had not yet succeeded in smashing Mercandon's door, though he was working at it with all his might, was caught in this sudden retreat. Placing his back to the wall, and grasping his sword firmly, he began not only to defend himself, but to attack his assailants, with cries so terrible that they were heard above all the uproar. He struck right and left, hitting friends and enemies, until a wide space was cleared around him. As his rapier made a hole in some breast, and the warm blood spurted over his hands and face, he, with dilated eye, expanded nostrils, and clinched teeth, regained the ground lost, and again approached the beleaguered house.

De Mouy, after a terrible combat in the staircase and hall, had finally come out of the burning house like a true hero. In the midst of all the struggle he had not ceased to cry, "Here, Maurevel! — Maurevel, where are you?" insulting him by the most opprobrious epithets.

He at length appeared in the street, supporting on one arm his mistress, half naked and nearly fainting, and holding a poniard between his teeth. His sword, flaming by the sweeping action he gave it, traced circles of white or red, according as the moon glittered on the blade or a flambeau glared on its blood-stained brightness.

Maurevel had fled. La Hurière, driven back by De Mouy as far as Coconnas, who did not recognize him, and received him at sword's point, was begging for mercy on both sides. At this moment Mercandon perceived him, and knew him, by his white scarf, to be one of the murderers. He fired. La Hurière shrieked, threw up his arms, dropped his arquebuse, and, after having vainly attempted to reach the wall, in order to support himself, fell with his face flat on the earth.

De Mouy took advantage of this circumstance, turned down the Rue de Paradis, and disappeared.

Such had been the resistance of the Huguenots that the De Guise party, quite repulsed, had retired into their hôtel, fearing to be besieged and taken in their own habitation.

Coconnas who, intoxicated with blood and tumult, had reached that degree of excitement when, with the men of the south more especially, courage changes into madness, had not seen or heard anything, and noticed only that there was not such a roar in his ears, and that his hands and face were a little dryer than they had been. Dropping the point of his sword, he saw near him a man lying face downward in a red stream, and around him burning houses.

It was a very short truce, for just as he was approaching this man, whom he recognized as La Hurière, the door of the house he had in vain tried to burst in, opened, and old Mercandon, followed by his son and two nephews, rushed upon him.

"Here he is! here he is!" cried they all, with one voice.

Coconnas was in the middle of the street, and fearing to be surrounded by these four men who assailed him at once, sprang backward with the agility of one of the chamois which he had so often hunted in his native mountains, and in an instant found himself with his back against the wall of the Hôtel de Guise. Once at ease as to not being surprised from behind he put himself in a posture of defence, and said, jestingly.

"Aha, father Mercandon, don't you know me?"

"Wretch!" cried the old Huguenot, "I know you well; you are engaged against me — me, your father's friend and companion."

"And his creditor, are you not?"

"Yes; his creditor, as you say."

"Well, then," said Coconnas, "I have come to settle our accounts."

"Seize him, bind him!" said Mercandon to the young men who accompanied him, and who at his bidding rushed toward the Piedmontese.

"One moment! one moment!" said Coconnas, laughing, "to seize a man you must have a writ, and you have forgotten to secure one from the provost."

And with these words he crossed his sword with the young man nearest to him and at the first blow cut his wrist.

The wounded man retreated with a howl.

"That will do for one!" said Coconnas.

At the same moment the window under which Coconnas had sought shelter opened noisily. He sprang to one side, fearing an attack from behind; but instead of an enemy he saw a woman; instead of the enemy's weapon he was prepared to encounter, a nosegay fell at his feet.

"Ah!" he said, "a woman!"

He saluted the lady with his sword, and stooped to pick up the bouquet.

"Be on your guard, brave Catholic! — be on your guard!" cried the lady.

Coconnas rose, but not before the second nephew's dagger had pierced his cloak, and wounded his other shoulder.

The lady uttered a piercing shriek.

Coconnas thanked her, assured her by a gesture, and then made a pass, which the nephew parried; but at the second thrust, his foot slipped in the blood, and Coconnas, springing at him like a tiger-cat, drove his sword through his breast.

"Good! good! brave cavalier!" exclaimed the lady of the Hôtel de Guise, "good! I will send you succor."

"Do not give yourself any trouble about that, madame," was Coconnas's reply; "rather look on to the end, if it interests you, and see how the Comte Annibal de Coconnas settles the Huguenots."

At this moment old Mercandon's son aimed a pistol at close range to Coconnas, and fired. The count fell on his knee. The lady at the window shrieked again; but Coconnas rose instantly; he had knelt only to avoid the bullet, which struck the wall about two feet beneath where the lady was standing.

Almost at the same moment a cry of rage issued from the window of Mercandon's house, and an old woman, who recognized Coconnas as a Catholic, from his white scarf and cross, hurled a flower-pot at him, which struck him above the knee.

"Capital!" said Coconnas; "one throws flowers at me and at the other, flower-pots; if this goes on, they'll be tearing houses down!"

"Thanks, mother, thanks!" said the young man.

"Go on, wife, go on," said old Mercandon; "but take care of yourself."

"Wait, Monsieur de Coconnas, wait!" said the young woman of the Hôtel de Guise, "I will have them shoot at the windows!"

"Ah! So it is a hell of women, is it?" said Coconnas. "Some of them for me and the others against me! By Heaven! let us put an end to this!"

The scene in fact was much changed and was evidently approaching its climax. Coconnas, who was wounded to be sure, but who had all the vigor of his four and twenty years, was used to arms, and angered rather than weakened by the three or four scratches he had received, now faced only Mercandon and his son: Mercandon, an aged man between sixty and seventy; his son, a youth of sixteen or eighteen, pale, fair-haired and slender, had flung down his pistol which had been discharged and was therefore useless, and was feebly brandishing a sword half as long as the Piedmontese's. The father, armed only with an unloaded arquebuse and a poniard, was calling for assistance. An old woman — the young man's mother — in the opposite window held in her hand a piece of marble which she was preparing to hurl.

Coconnas, excited on the one hand by threats, and on the other by encouragements, proud of his twofold victory, intoxicated with powder and blood, lighted by the reflection of a burning house, elated by the idea that he was fighting under the eyes of a woman whose beauty was as superior as he was sure her rank was high, — Coconnas, like the last of the Horatii, felt his strength redouble, and seeing the young man falter, rushed on him and crossed his small weapon with his terrible and bloody rapier. Two strokes sufficed to drive it out of its owner's hands. Then Mercandon tried to drive Coconnas back, so that the projectiles thrown from the window might be sure to strike him, but Coconnas, to paralyze the double attack of the old man, who tried to stab him with his dagger, and the mother of the young man, who was endeavoring to break his skull with a stone she was ready to throw, seized his adversary by the body, presenting him to all the blows,

like a shield, and well-nigh strangling him in his Herculean grasp.

"Help! help!" cried the young man; "he is crushing my chest — help! help!"

And his voice grew faint in a low and choking groan.

Then Mercandon ceased to attack, and began to entreat.

"Mercy, mercy! Monsieur de Coconnas, have mercy! — he is my only child!"

"He is my son, my son!" cried the mother; "the hope of our old age! Do not kill him, sir, — do not kill him!"

"Really," cried Coconnas, bursting into laughter, "not kill him! What, pray, did he mean to do to me, with his sword and pistol?"

"Sir," said Mercandon, clasping his hands, "I have at home your father's note of hand, I will give it back to you — I have ten thousand crowns of gold, I will give them to you — I have our family jewels, they shall be yours; but do not kill him — do not kill him!"

"And I have my love," said the lady in the Hôtel de Guise, in a low tone, "and I promise it you."

Coconnas reflected a moment, and said suddenly:

"Are you a Huguenot?"

"Yes, I am," murmured the youth.

"Then you must die!" replied Coconnas, frowning and putting to his adversary's breast his keen and glittering dagger.

"Die!" cried the old man; "my poor child die!"

And the mother's shriek resounded so pitifully and loud that for a moment it shook the Piedmontese's firm resolution.

"Oh, Madame la Duchesse!" cried the father, turning toward the lady at the Hôtel de Guise, "intercede for us, and every morning and evening you shall be remembered in our prayers."

"Then let him be a convert," said the lady.

"I am a Protestant," said the boy.

"Then die!" exclaimed Coconnas, lifting his dagger; "die! since you will not accept the life which those lovely lips offer to you."

Mercandon and his wife saw the blade of that deadly weapon gleam like lightning above the head of their son.

"My son Olivier," shrieked his mother, "abjure, abjure!"

"Abjure, my dear boy!" cried Mercandon, going on his knees to Coconnas; "do not leave us alone on the earth!"

"Abjure all together," said Coconnas; "for one *Credo*, three souls and one life."

"I am willing," said the youth.

"We are willing!" cried Mercandon and his wife.

"On your knees, then," said Coconnas, "and let your son repeat after me, word for word, the prayer I shall say."

The father obeyed first.

"I am ready," said the son, also kneeling.

Coconnas then began to repeat in Latin the words of the *Credo*. But whether from chance or calculation, young Olivier knelt close to where his sword had fallen. Scarcely did he see this weapon within his reach than, not ceasing to repeat the words which Coconnas dictated, he stretched out his hand to take it up. Coconnas watched the movement, although he pretended not to see it; but at the moment when the young man touched the handle of the sword with his fingers he rushed on him, knocked him over, exclaiming, "Ah, traitor!" and plunged his dagger into his throat.

The youth uttered one cry, raised himself convulsively on his knee, and fell dead.

"Ah, ruffian!" shrieked Mercandon, "you slay us to rob us of the hundred rose nobles you owe us."

"Faith! no," said Coconnas, "and the proof," — and as he said these words he flung at the old man's feet the purse which his father had given him before his departure to pay his creditor, — "and the proof," he went on to say, "is this money which I give you!"

"And here's your death!" cried the old woman from the window.

"Take care, M. de Coconnas, take care!" called out the lady at the Hôtel de Guise.

But before Coconnas could turn his head to comply with this advice, or get out of the way of the threat, a heavy mass came hissing through the air, fell on the Piedmontese's hat, broke his sword, and prostrated him on the pavement; he was overcome, crushed, so that he did not hear the double cry of joy and distress which came from the right and left.

Mercandon instantly rushed, dagger in hand, on Coconnas, now bereft of his senses; but at this moment the door of the Hôtel de Guise opened, and the old mau, seeing swords and partisans gleaming, fled, while the lady he had called "Madame la Duchesse," her beauty terrible in the light of the flames,

dazzling with diamonds and other gems, leaned half out of the window, in order to direct the newcomers, pointing her arm toward Coconnas.

"There! there! in front of me — a gentleman in a red doublet. There! — that is he — yes, that is he."

CHAPTER X.

DEATH, MASS, OR THE BASTILLE.

MARGUERITE, as we have said, had shut the door and returned to her chamber. But as she entered, panting, she saw Gillonne, who, terror-struck, was leaning against the door of the closet, staring at the traces of blood on the bed, the furniture, and the carpet.

"Ah! madame!" she cried when she saw the queen. "Oh! madame! tell me, is he dead?"

"Silence!" said Marguerite in that tone of voice which gives some indication of the importance of the command.

Gillonne was silent.

Marguerite then took from her purse a tiny gilded key, opened the closet door, and showed the young man to the servant. La Mole had succeeded in getting to his feet and making his way to the window. A small poniard, such as women at that time were in the habit of carrying, was at hand, and when he heard the door opening he had seized it.

"Fear nothing, sir," said Marguerite; "for, on my soul, you are in safety!"

La Mole sank on his knees.

"Oh, madame," he cried, "you are more than a queen — you are a goddess!"

"Do not agitate yourself, sir," said Marguerite, "your blood is still flowing. Oh, look, Gillonne, how pale he is — let us see where you are wounded."

"Madame," said La Mole, trying to fix on certain parts of his body the pain which pervaded his whole frame, "I think I have a dagger-thrust in my shoulder, another in my chest, — the other wounds are not worth bothering about."

"We will see," said Marguerite. "Gillonne, bring me my balsam casket."

Gillonne obeyed, and returned holding in one hand a casket, and in the other a silver-gilt ewer and some fine Holland linen.

"Help me to lift him, Gillonne," said Queen Marguerite; "for in attempting to get up the poor gentleman has lost all his strength."

"But, madame," said La Mole, "I am wholly confused. Indeed, I cannot allow"—

"But, sir, you will let us do for you, I think," said Marguerite. "When we may save you, it would be a crime to let you die."

"Oh!" cried La Mole, "I would rather die than see you, the queen, stain your hands with blood as unworthy as mine. Oh, never, never!"

And he drew back respectfully.

"Your blood, sir," replied Gillonne, with a smile, "has already stained her majesty's bed and chamber."

Marguerite folded her mantle over her cambric peignoir, all bespattered with small red spots. This movement, so expressive of feminine modesty, caused La Mole to remember that he had held in his arms and pressed to his heart this beautiful, beloved queen, and at the recollection a fugitive glow of color came into his pallid cheeks.

"Madame," stammered La Mole, "can you not leave me to the care of the surgeon?"

"Of a Catholic surgeon, perhaps," said the queen, with an expression which La Mole understood and which made him shudder. "Do you not know," continued the queen in a voice and with a smile of incomparable sweetness, "that we daughters of France are trained to know the qualities of herbs and to make balsams? for our duty as women and as queens has always been to soften pain. Therefore we are equal to the best surgeons in the world; so our flatterers say! Has not my reputation in this regard come to your ears? Come, Gillonne, let us to work!"

La Mole again endeavored to resist; he repeated that he would rather die than occasion the queen labor which, though begun in pity, might end in disgust; but this exertion completely exhausted his strength, and falling back, he fainted a second time.

Marguerite, then seizing the poniard which he had dropped, quickly cut the lace of his doublet; while Gillonne, with another blade, ripped open the sleeves.

Next Gillonne, with a cloth dipped in fresh water, stanched the blood which escaped from his shoulder and breast, and Marguerite, with a silver needle with a round point, probed the wounds with all the delicacy and skill that Maître Ambroise Paré could have displayed in such a case.

"A dangerous but not mortal wound, *acerrimum humeri vulnus, non autem lethale,*" murmured the lovely and learned lady-surgeon; "hand me the salve, Gillonne, and get the lint ready."

Meantime Gillonne, to whom the queen had just given this new order, had already dried and perfumed the young man's chest and arms, which were like an antique model, as well as his shoulders, which fell gracefully back; his neck shaded by thick, curling locks, and which seemed rather to belong to a statue of Parian marble than the mangled frame of a dying man.

"Poor young man!" whispered Gillonne, looking not so much at her work as at the object of it.

"Is he not handsome?" said Marguerite, with royal frankness.

"Yes, madame; but it seems to me that instead of leaving him lying there on the floor, we should lift him on this couch against which he is leaning."

"Yes," said Marguerite, "you are right."

And the two women, bending over, uniting their strength, raised La Mole, and laid him on a kind of great sofa in front of the window, which they opened in order to give them fresh air.

This movement aroused La Mole, who drew a long sigh, and opening his eyes, began to experience that indescribable sensation of well-being which comes to a wounded man when on his return to consciousness he finds coolness instead of burning heat, and the perfumes of balsams instead of the nauseating odor of blood.

He muttered some disconnected words, to which Marguerite replied with a smile, placing her finger on her lips.

At this moment several raps on the door were heard.

"Some one knocks at the secret passage," said Marguerite.

"Who can be coming, madame?" asked Gillonne, in a panic.

"I will go and see who it is," said Marguerite; "remain here, and do not leave him for a single instant."

Marguerite went into the chamber, and closing the closet

door, opened that of the passage which led to the King's and queen mother's apartments.

"Madame de Sauve!" she exclaimed, suddenly drawing back with an expression which resembled hatred, if not terror, so true it is that a woman never forgives another for taking from her even a man whom she does not love, — "Madame de Sauve!"

"Yes, your majesty!" she replied, clasping her hands.

"You here, madame?" exclaimed Marguerite, more and more surprised, while at the same time her voice grew more and more imperative.

Charlotte fell on her knees.

"Madame," she said, "pardon me! I know how guilty I am toward you; but if you knew — the fault is not wholly mine; an express command of the queen mother" —

"Rise!" said Marguerite, "and as I do not suppose you have come with the intention of justifying yourself to me, tell me why you have come at all."

"I have come, madame," said Charlotte, still on her knees, and with a look of wild alarm, "I came to ask you if he were not here?"

"Here! who? — of whom are you speaking, madame? for I really do not understand."

"Of the king!"

"Of the king? What, do you follow him to my apartments? You know very well that he never comes here."

"Ah, madame!" continued the Baronne de Sauve, without replying to these attacks, or even seeming to comprehend them, "ah, would to Heaven he were here!"

"And why so?"

"Eh, *mon Dieu!* madame, because they are murdering the Huguenots, and the King of Navarre is the chief of the Huguenots."

"Oh!" cried Marguerite, seizing Madame de Sauve by the hand, and compelling her to rise; "ah! I had forgotten; besides, I did not think a king could run the same dangers as other men."

"More, madame, — a thousand times more!" cried Charlotte.

"In fact, Madame de Lorraine had warned me; I had begged him not to leave the Louvre. Has he done so?"

"No, no, madame, he is in the Louvre; but if he is not here" —

"He is not here!"

"Oh!" cried Madame de Sauve, with an outburst of agony, "then he is a dead man, for the queen mother has sworn his destruction!"

"His destruction! ah," said Marguerite, "you terrify me — impossible!"

"Madame," replied Madame de Sauve, with that energy which passion alone can give, "I tell you that no one knows where the King of Navarre is."

"And where is the queen mother?"

"The queen mother sent me to find Monsieur de Guise and Monsieur de Tavannes, who were in her oratory, and then dismissed me. Then — pardon me, madame — I went to my room and waited as usual."

"For my husband, I suppose."

"He did not come, madame. Then I sought for him everywhere and asked every one for him. One soldier told me he thought he had seen him in the midst of the guards who accompanied him, with his sword drawn in his hand, some time before the massacre began, and the massacre has begun an hour ago."

"Thanks, madame," said Marguerite; "and although perhaps the sentiment which impels you is an additional offence toward me, — yet, again, I thank you!"

"Oh, forgive me, madame!" she said, "and I will return to my apartments stronger for your pardon, for I dare not follow you, even at a distance."

Marguerite extended her hand to her.

"I will go to Queen Catharine," she said. "Return to your room. The King of Navarre is under my protection; I have promised him my alliance and I will be faithful to my promise."

"But suppose you cannot obtain access to the queen mother, madame?"

"Then I will go to my brother Charles, and I will speak to him."

"Go, madame, go," said Charlotte, leaving Marguerite room to pass, "and may God guide your majesty!"

Marguerite darted down the corridor, but when she reached the end of it she turned to make sure that Madame de Sauve was not lingering behind. Madame de Sauve was following her.

The Queen of Navarre saw her go upstairs to her own apartment, and then she herself went toward the queen's chamber.

All was changed here. Instead of the crowd of eager courtiers, who usually opened their ranks before the queen and respectfully saluted her, Marguerite met only guards with red partisans and garments stained with blood, or gentlemen in torn cloaks, — their faces blackened with powder, bearing orders and despatches, — some going in, others going out, and all this movement back and forth made a great and terrible confusion in the galleries.

Marguerite, however, went boldly on until she reached the queen mother's antechamber. But this room was guarded by a double file of soldiers, who allowed only those who had a certain countersign to enter. Marguerite in vain tried to pass this living barrier; several times she saw the door open and shut, and each time she saw Catharine, her youth restored by action, as alert as if she were only twenty years of age, writing, receiving letters, opening them, addressing a word to one, a smile to another; and those on whom she smiled most graciously were those who were the most covered with dust and blood.

Amid this vast tumult which reigned in the Louvre and filled it with frightful clamors, could be heard the rattling of musketry more and more insistently repeated.

"I shall never get to her," said Marguerite to herself after she had made three ineffectual attempts to pass the halberdiers. "Rather than waste my time here, I must go and find my brother."

At this moment M. de Guise passed; he had just informed the queen of the murder of the admiral, and was returning to the butchery.

"Oh, Henry!" cried Marguerite, "where is the King of Navarre?"

The duke looked at her with a smile of astonishment, bowed, and without any reply passed out with his guards.

Marguerite ran to a captain who was on the point of leaving the Louvre and was engaged in having his men's arquebuses loaded.

"The King of Navarre!" she exclaimed; "sir, where is the King of Navarre?"

"I do not know, madame," replied the captain, "I do not belong to his majesty's guards."

"Ah, my dear Réné," said the queen, recognizing Catharine's perfumer, "is that you? — you have just left my mother. Do you know what has become of my husband?"

"His majesty the King of Navarre is no friend of mine, madame, you ought to remember that. It is even said," he added, with a contraction of his features more like a grimace than a smile, "it is even said that he ventures to accuse me of having been the accomplice, with Madame Catharine, in poisoning his mother."

"No, no!" cried Marguerite, "my good Réné, do not believe that!"

"Oh, it is of little consequence, madame!" said the perfumer; "neither the King of Navarre nor his party is any longer to be feared!"

And he turned his back on Marguerite.

"Ah, Monsieur de Tavannes!" cried Marguerite, "one word, I beseech you!"

Tavannes, who was going by, stopped.

"Where is Henry of Navarre?"

"Faith," he replied, in a loud voice, "I believe he is somewhere in the city with the Messieurs d'Alençon and de Condé."

And then he added, in a tone so low that the queen alone could hear:

"Your majesty, if you would see him, — to be in whose place I would give my life, — go to the king's armory."

"Thanks, Tavannes, thanks!" said Marguerite, who, of all that Tavannes had said, had heard only the chief direction; "thank you, I will go there."

And she went on her way, murmuring:

"Oh, after all I promised him — after the way in which he behaved to me when that ingrate, Henry de Guise, was concealed in the closet — I cannot let him perish!"

And she knocked at the door of the King's apartments; but they were encompassed within by two companies of guards.

"No one is admitted to the King," said the officer, coming forward.

"But I" — said Marguerite.

"The order is general."

"I, the Queen of Navarre! — I, his sister!"

"My orders admit of no exception, madame; I pray you to pardon me."

And the officer closed the door.

"Oh, he is lost!" exclaimed Marguerite, alarmed at the sight of all those sinister faces, which even if they did not breathe vengeance, expressed sternness of purpose. "Yes, yes! I comprehend all. I have been used as a bait. I am the snare which has entrapped the Huguenots; but I will enter, if I am killed in the attempt!"

And Marguerite ran like a mad creature through the corridors and galleries, when suddenly, as she passed by a small door, she heard a sweet song, almost melancholy, so monotonous it was. It was a Calvinistic psalm, sung by a trembling voice in the next room.

"My brother the king's nurse — the good Madelon — she is there!" exclaimed Marguerite. "God of the Christians, aid me now!"

And, full of hope, Marguerite knocked at the little door.

Soon after the counsel which Marguerite had conveyed to him, after his conversation with Réné, and after leaving the queen mother's chamber, in spite of the efforts of the poor little Phœbe, — who like a good genius tried to detain him, — Henry of Navarre had met several Catholic gentlemen, who, under a pretext of doing him honor, had escorted him to his apartments, where a score of Huguenots awaited him, who had rallied round the young prince, and, having once rallied, would not leave him — so strongly, for some hours, had the presentiment of that fatal night weighed on the Louvre. They had remained there, without any one attempting to disturb them. At last, at the first stroke of the bell of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois, which resounded through all hearts like a funeral knell, Tavannes entered, and, in the midst of a death-like silence, announced that King Charles IX. desired to speak to Henry.

It was useless to attempt resistance, and no one thought of it. They heard the ceilings, galleries, and corridors creaking beneath the feet of the assembled soldiers, who were in the court-yards, as well as in the apartments, to the number of two thousand. Henry, after having taken leave of his friends, whom he was never again to see, followed Tavannes, who led him to a small gallery next the King's apartments, where he left him alone, unarmed, and a prey to mistrust.

The King of Navarre counted here alone, minute by minute, two mortal hours; listening, with increasing alarm, to the sound of the tocsin and the discharge of fire-arms; seeing

through a small window, by the light of the flames and flambeaux, the refugees and their assassins pass; understanding nothing of these shrieks of murder, these cries of distress, — not even suspecting, in spite of his knowledge of Charles IX., the queen mother, and the Duc de Guise, the horrible drama at this moment enacting.

Henry had not physical courage, but he had better than that — he had moral fortitude. Though he feared danger, yet he smiled at it and faced it; but it was danger in the field of battle — danger in the open air — danger in the eyes of all, and attended by the noisy harmony of trumpets and the loud and vibrating beat of drums; but now he was weaponless, alone, locked in, shut up in a semi-darkness where he could scarcely see the enemy that might glide toward him, and the weapon that might be raised to strike him.

These two hours were, perhaps, the most agonizing of his life.

In the hottest of the tumult, and as Henry was beginning to understand that, in all probability, this was some organized massacre, a captain came to him, and conducted the prince along a corridor to the King's rooms. As they approached, the door opened and closed behind them as if by magic. The captain then led Henry to the King, who was in his armory.

When they entered, the King was seated in a great armchair, his two hands placed on the two arms of the seat, and his head falling on his chest. At the noise made by their entrance Charles looked up, and Henry observed the perspiration dropping from his brow like large beads.

"Good evening, Harry," said the young King, roughly. "La Chastre, leave us."

The captain obeyed.

A gloomy silence ensued. Henry looked around him with uneasiness, and saw that he was alone with the King.

Charles IX. suddenly arose.

"*Par la mordieu!*" said he, passing his hands through his light brown hair, and wiping his brow at the same time, "you are glad to be with me, are you not, Harry?"

"Certainly, sire," replied the King of Navarre, "I am always happy to be with your Majesty."

"Happier than if you were down there, eh?" continued Charles, following his own thoughts rather than replying to Henry's compliment.

"I do not understand, sire," replied Henry.

"Look out, then, and you will soon understand."

And with a quick movement Charles stepped or rather sprang to the window, and drawing with him his brother-in-law, who became more and more terror-stricken, he pointed to him the horrible outlines of the assassins, who, on the deck of a boat, were cutting the throats or drowning the victims brought them at every moment.

"In the name of Heaven," cried Henry, "what is going on to-night?"

"To-night, sir," replied Charles IX., "they are ridding me of all the Huguenots. Look yonder, over the Hôtel de Bourbon, at the smoke and flames: they are the smoke and flames of the admiral's house, which is on fire. Do you see that body, which these good Catholics are drawing on a torn mattress? It is the corpse of the admiral's son-in-law — the carcass of your friend, Téligny."

"What means this?" cried the King of Navarre, seeking vainly by his side for the hilt of his dagger, and trembling equally with shame and anger; for he felt that he was at the same time laughed at and threatened.

"It means," cried Charles IX., becoming suddenly furious, and turning frightfully pale, "it means that I will no longer have any Huguenots about me. Do you hear me, Henry? — Am I King? Am I master?"

"But, your Majesty" —

"My Majesty kills and massacres at this moment all that is not Catholic; it is my pleasure. Are you a Catholic?" exclaimed Charles, whose anger was rising higher and higher, like an awful tide.

"Sire," replied Henry, "do you remember your own words, 'What matters the religion of those who serve me well'?"

"Ha! ha! ha!" cried Charles, bursting into a ferocious laugh; "you ask me if I remember my words, Henry! '*Verba volant*,' as my sister Margot says; and had not all those" — and he pointed to the city with his finger — "served me well, also? Were they not brave in battle, wise in council, deeply devoted? They were all useful subjects — but they were Huguenots, and I want none but Catholics."

Henry remained silent.

"Do you understand me now, Harry?" asked Charles.

"I understand, sire."

"Well?"

"Well, sire, I do not see why the King of Navarre should not do what so many gentlemen and poor folk have done. For if they all die, poor unfortunates, it is because the same terms have been proposed to them which your Majesty proposes to me, and they have refused, as I refuse."

Charles seized the young prince's arm, and fixed on him a look the vacancy of which suddenly changed into a fierce and savage scowl.

"What!" he said, "do you believe that I have taken the trouble to offer the mass to those whose throats we are cutting yonder?"

"Sire," said Henry, disengaging his arm, "will you not die in the religion of your fathers?"

"Yes, *par la mordieu!* and you?"

"Well, sire, I will do the same!" replied Henry.

Charles uttered a roar of rage and, with trembling hand, seized his arquebuse, which lay on the table.

Henry, who stood leaning against the tapestry, with the perspiration on his brow, and nevertheless, owing to his presence of mind, calm to all appearance, followed every movement of the terrible king with the greedy stupefaction of a bird fascinated by a serpent.

Charles cocked his arquebuse, and stamping with blind rage cried, as he dazzled Henry's eyes with the polished barrel of the deadly gun:

"Will you accept the mass?"

Henry remained mute.

Charles IX. shook the vaults of the Louvre with the most terrible oath that ever issued from the lips of man, and grew even more livid than before.

"Death, mass, or the Bastille!" he cried, taking aim at the King of Navarre.

"Oh, sire!" exclaimed Henry, "will you kill me — me, your brother?"

Henry thus, by his incomparable cleverness, which was one of the strongest faculties of his organization, evaded the answer which Charles IX. expected, for undoubtedly had his reply been in the negative Henry had been a dead man.

As immediately after the climax of rage, reaction begins, Charles IX. did not repeat the question he had addressed to the Prince of Navarre; and after a moment's hesitation, dur-

ing which he uttered a hoarse kind of growl, he went back to the open window, and aimed at a man who was running along the quay in front.

"I must kill some one!" cried Charles IX., ghastly as a corpse, his eyes suffused with blood; and firing as he spoke, he struck the man who was running.

Henry uttered a groan.

Then, animated by a frightful ardor, Charles loaded and fired his arquebuse without cessation, uttering cries of joy every time his aim was successful.

"It is all over with me!" said the King of Navarre to himself; "when he sees no one else to kill, he will kill me!"

"Well," said a voice behind the princes, suddenly, "is it done?"

It was Catharine de Médicis, who had entered unobserved just as the King was firing his last shot.

"No, thousand thunders of hell!" said the King, throwing his arquebuse across the room. "No, the obstinate blockhead — he will not consent!"

Catharine made no reply. She turned her eyes slowly where Henry stood as motionless as one of the figures of the tapestry against which he was leaning. She then gave a glance at the King, which seemed to say:

"Then why he is alive?"

"He is alive, he is alive!" murmured Charles IX., who perfectly understood the glance, and replied to it without hesitation, — "he is alive — because he is my relative."

Catharine smiled.

Henry saw the smile, and realized that his struggle was to be with Catharine.

"Madame," he said to her, "the whole thing comes from you, I see very well, and my brother-in-law Charles is not to blame. You laid the plan for drawing me into a snare. You made your daughter the bait which was to destroy us all. You separated me from my wife that she might not see me killed before her eyes" —

"Yes, but that shall not be!" cried another voice, breathless and impassioned, which Henry instantly recognized and which made Charles start with surprise and Catharine with rage.

"Marguerite!" exclaimed Henry.

"Margot!" said Charles IX.

"My daughter!" muttered Catharine.

"Sire," said Marguerite to Henry, "your last words were an accusation against me, and you were both right and wrong, — right, for I am the means by which they attempted to destroy you; wrong, for I did not know that you were going to your destruction. I, sire, owe my own life to chance — to my mother's forgetfulness, perhaps; but as soon as I learned your danger I remembered my duty, and a wife's duty is to share her husband's fortunes. If you are exiled, sire, I will follow you into exile; if you are put into prison I will be your fellow-captive; if they kill you, I will also die."

And she offered her husband her hand, which he eagerly seized, if not with love, at least with gratitude.

"Oh, my poor Margot!" said Charles, "you had much better bid him become a Catholic!"

"Sire," replied Marguerite, with that lofty dignity which was so natural to her, "for your own sake do not ask any prince of your house to commit a cowardly act."

Catharine darted a significant glance at Charles.

"Brother," cried Marguerite, who equally well with Charles IX. understood Catharine's ominous pantomime, "my brother, remember! you made him my husband!"

Charles IX., at bay between Catharine's commanding eyes and Marguerite's supplicating look, as if between the two opposing principles of good and evil, stood for an instant undecided; at last Ormazd won the day.

"In truth," said he, whispering in Catharine's ear, "Margot is right, and Harry is my brother-in-law."

"Yes," replied Catharine in a similar whisper in her son's ear, "yes — but supposing he were not?"

CHAPTER XI.

THE HAWTHORN OF THE CEMETERY OF THE INNOCENTS.

As soon as Marguerite reached her own apartments she tried in vain to divine the words which Catharine de Médicis had whispered to Charles IX., and which had cut short the terrible council of life and death which was taking place.

She spent a part of the morning in attending to La Mole, and the rest in trying to guess the enigma, which her mind could not discover.

The King of Navarre remained a prisoner in the Louvre, the persecution of the Huguenots went on hotter than ever. The terrible night was followed by a day of massacre still more horrible. No longer the bells rang the tocsin, but *Te Deums*, and the echoes of these joyous notes, resounding amid fire and slaughter, were perhaps even more lugubrious in sunlight than had been the last night's knell sounding in darkness. This was not all. A strange thing had happened: a hawthorn-tree, which had blossomed in the spring, and which, as usual, had lost its odorous flowers in the month of June, had blossomed again during the night, and the Catholics, who saw a miracle in this event, spread the report of the miracle far and wide, thus making God their accomplice; and with cross and banners they marched in a procession to the Cemetery of the Innocents, where this hawthorn-tree was blooming.

This method of acquiescence which Heaven seemed to show in the massacres redoubled the ardor of the assassins, and while every street, every square, every alley-way of the city continued to present a scene of desolation, the Louvre had become the common tomb for all Protestants who had been shut up there when the signal was given. The King of Navarre, the Prince de Condé, and La Mole were the only survivors.

Assured as to La Mole, whose wounds, as she had declared the evening before, were severe but not dangerous, Marguerite's mind was now occupied with one single idea: that was to save her husband's life, which was still threatened. No doubt the first sentiment which actuated the wife was one of generous pity for a man for whom, as the Béarnais himself had said, she had sworn, if not love, at least alliance; but there was, beside, another sentiment not so pure, which had penetrated the queen's heart.

Marguerite was ambitious, and had foreseen almost the certainty of royalty in her marriage with Henry de Bourbon. Navarre, though beset on one side by the kings of France and on the other by the kings of Spain, who strip by strip had absorbed half of its territory, might become a real kingdom with the French Huguenots for subjects, if only Henry de Bourbon should fulfil the hopes which the courage shown by him on the infrequent occasions vouchsafed him of drawing his sword had aroused.

Marguerite, with her keen, lofty intellect, foresaw and reck-

oned on all this. So if she lost Henry she lost not only a husband, but a throne.

As she was absorbed in these reflections she heard some one knocking at the door of the secret corridor. She started, for only three persons came by that door, — the King, the queen mother, and the Duc d'Alençon. She opened the closet door, made a gesture of silence to Gillonne and La Mole, and then went to let her visitor in.

It was the Duc d'Alençon.

The young prince had not been seen since the night before. For a moment, Marguerite had conceived the idea of asking his intercession for the King of Navarre, but a terrible idea restrained her. The marriage had taken place against his wishes. François detested Henry, and had evinced his neutrality toward the Béarnais only because he was convinced that Henry and his wife had remained strangers to each other. A mark of interest shown by Marguerite in her husband might thrust one of the three threatening poniards into his heart instead of turning it aside. Marguerite, therefore, on perceiving the young prince, shuddered more than she had shuddered at seeing the King or even the queen mother. Nevertheless no one could have told by his appearance that anything unusual was taking place either in the city or at the Louvre. He was dressed with his usual elegance. His clothes and linen breathed of those perfumes which Charles IX. despised, but of which the Duc d'Anjou and he made continual use.

A practised eye like Marguerite's, however, could detect the fact that in spite of his rather unusual pallor and in spite of a slight trembling in his hands — delicate hands, as carefully treated as a lady's — he felt a deep sense of joy in the bottom of his heart. His entrance was in no wise different from usual. He went to his sister to kiss her, but Marguerite, instead of offering him her cheek, as she would have done had it been King Charles or the Duc d'Anjou, made a courtesy and allowed him to kiss her forehead.

The Duc d'Alençon sighed and touched his bloodless lips to her brow.

Then taking a seat he began to tell his sister the sanguinary news of the night, the admiral's lingering and terrible death, Téligny's instantaneous death caused by a bullet. He took his time and emphasized all the bloody details of that night,

with that love of blood characteristic of himself and his two brothers; Marguerite allowed him to tell his story.

"You did not come to tell me this only, brother?" she then asked.

The Duc d'Alençon smiled.

"You have something else to say to me?"

"No," replied the duke; "I am waiting."

"Waiting! for what?"

"Have you not told me, dearest Marguerite," said the duke, drawing his armchair close up to his sister's, "that your marriage with the King of Navarre was contracted against your wishes?"

"Yes, no doubt. I did not know the Prince of Béarn when he was proposed to me as a husband."

"And after you came to know him, did you not tell me that you felt no love for him?"

"I told you so; it is true."

"Was it not your opinion that this marriage would make you unhappy?"

"My dear François," said Marguerite, "when a marriage is not the height of happiness it is almost always the depth of wretchedness."

"Well, then, my dear Marguerite, as I said to you, — I am waiting."

"But what are you waiting for?"

"For you to display your joy!"

"What have I to be joyful for?"

"The unexpected chance which offers itself for you to resume your liberty."

"My liberty?" replied Marguerite, who was determined to compel the prince to express his whole thought.

"Yes; your liberty! You will now be separated from the King of Navarre."

"Separated!" said Marguerite, fastening her eyes on the young prince.

The Duc d'Alençon tried to endure his sister's look, but his eyes soon avoided hers with embarrassment.

"Separated!" repeated Marguerite; "let us talk this over, brother, for I should like to understand all you mean, and how you propose to separate us."

"Why," murmured the duke, "Henry is a Huguenot."

"No doubt; but he made no secret of his religion, and that was known when we were married."

"Yes; but since your marriage, sister," asked the duke, involuntarily allowing a ray of joy to shine upon his face, "what has Henry been doing?"

"Why, you know better than any one, François, for he has spent his days almost constantly in your society, either hunting or playing mall or tennis."

"Yes, his days, no doubt," replied the duke; "his days — but his nights?"

Marguerite was silent; it was now her turn to cast down her eyes.

"His nights," persisted the Duc d'Alençon, "his nights?"

"Well?" inquired Marguerite, feeling that it was requisite that she should say something in reply.

"Well, he has been spending them with Madame de Sauve!"

"How do you know that?" exclaimed Marguerite.

"I know it because I have an interest in knowing it," replied the young prince, growing pale and picking the embroidery of his sleeves.

Marguerite began to understand what Catharine had whispered to Charles, but pretended to remain in ignorance.

"Why do you tell me this, brother?" she replied, with a well-affected air of melancholy; "was it to remind me that no one here loves me or takes my part, neither those whom nature gave me as protectors nor the man whom the Church gave me as my husband?"

"You are unjust," said the Duc d'Alençon, drawing his armchair still nearer to his sister, "I love you and protect you!"

"Brother," said Marguerite, looking at him sharply, "have you anything to say to me from the queen mother?"

"I! you mistake, sister. I swear to you — what can make you think that?"

"What can make me think that? — why, because you are breaking off the intimacy that binds you to my husband, because you are abandoning the cause of the King of Navarre."

"The cause of the King of Navarre!" replied the Duc d'Alençon, wholly at his wits' end.

"Yes, certainly. Now look here, François; let us speak frankly. You have come to an agreement a score of times;

you cannot raise yourself or even hold your own except by mutual help. This alliance"—

"Has now become impossible, sister," interrupted the Duc d'Alençon.

"And why so?"

"Because the King has designs on your husband! Pardon me, when I said *your husband*, I erred; I meant Henry of Navarre. Our mother has seen through the whole thing. I entered into an alliance with the Huguenots because I believed the Huguenots were in favor; but now they are killing the Huguenots, and in another week there will not remain fifty in the whole kingdom. I gave my hand to the King of Navarre because he was — your husband; but now he is not your husband. What can you say to that — you who are not only the loveliest woman in France, but have the clearest head in the kingdom?"

"Why, I have this to say," replied Marguerite, "I know our brother Charles; I saw him yesterday in one of those fits of frenzy, every one of which shortens his life ten years. I have to say that unfortunately these attacks are very frequent, and that thus, in all probability, our brother Charles has not very long to live; and, finally, I have to say that the King of Poland has just died, and the question of electing a prince of the house of France in his stead is much discussed; and when circumstances are thus, it is not the moment to abandon allies who, in the moment of struggle, might support us with the strength of a nation and the power of a kingdom."

"And you!" exclaimed the duke, "do you not act much more treasonably to me in preferring a foreigner to your own brother?"

"Explain yourself, François! In what have I acted treasonably to you?"

"You yesterday begged the life of the King of Navarre from King Charles."

"Well?" said Marguerite, with pretended innocence.

The duke rose hastily, paced round the chamber twice or thrice with a bewildered air, then came back and took Marguerite's hand.

It was cold and unresponsive.

"Good-by, sister!" he said at last. "You will not understand me; do not, therefore, complain of whatever misfortunes may happen to you."

Marguerite grew pale, but remained motionless in her place. She saw the Duc d'Alençon go away, without making any attempt to detain him; but he had scarcely more than disappeared down the corridor when he returned.

"Listen, Marguerite," he said, "I had forgotten to tell you one thing; that is, that by this time to-morrow the King of Navarre will be dead."

Marguerite uttered a cry, for the idea that she was the instrument of assassination caused in her a terror she could not subdue.

"And you will not prevent his death?" she said; "you will not save your best and most faithful ally?"

"Since yesterday the King of Navarre is no longer my ally."

"Who is, pray?"

"Monsieur de Guise. By destroying the Huguenots, Monsieur de Guise has become the king of the Catholics."

"And does a son of Henry II. recognize a duke of Lorraine as his king?"

"You are in a bad frame of mind, Marguerite, and you do not understand anything."

"I confess that I try in vain to read your thoughts."

"Sister, you are of as good a house as the Princesse de Porcian; De Guise is no more immortal than the King of Navarre. Now, then, Marguerite, suppose three things, three possibilities: first, suppose monsieur is chosen King of Poland; the second, that you loved me as I love you; well, I am King of France, and you are — queen of the Catholics."

Marguerite hid her face in her hands, overwhelmed at the depth of the views of this youth, whom no one at court thought possessed of even common understanding.

"But," she asked after a moment's silence, "I hope you are not jealous of Monsieur le Duc de Guise as you were of the King of Navarre!"

"What is done is done," said the Duc d'Alençon, in a muffled voice, "and if I had to be jealous of the Duc de Guise, well, then, I was!"

"There is only one thing that can prevent this capital plan from succeeding, brother."

"And what is that?"

"That I no longer love the Duc de Guise."

"And whom, pray, do you love?"

"No one."

The Duc d'Alençon looked at Marguerite with the astonishment of a man who takes his turn in failing to understand, and left the room, pressing his icy hand on his forehead, which ached to bursting.

Marguerite remained alone and thoughtful; the situation was beginning to take a clear and definite shape before her eyes; the King had permitted Saint Bartholomew's, Queen Catharine and the Duc de Guise had put it into execution. The Duc de Guise and the Duc d'Alençon were about to join partnership so as to get the greatest possible advantage. The death of the King of Navarre would be a natural result of this great catastrophe. With the King of Navarre out of the way, his kingdom would be seized upon, Marguerite would be left a throneless, impotent widow with no other prospect before her than a nunnery, where she would not even have the sad consolation of weeping for a consort who had never been her husband.

She was still in the same position when Queen Catharine sent to ask if she would not like to go with her and the whole court on a pious visitation to the hawthorn of the Cemetery of the Innocents. Marguerite's first impulse was to refuse to take part in this cavalcade. But the thought that this excursion might possibly give her a chance to learn something new about the King of Navarre's fate decided her to go. So she sent word that if they would have a palfrey ready for her she would willingly go with their majesties.

Five minutes later a page came to ask if she was ready to go down, for the procession was preparing to start.

Marguerite warned Gillonne by a gesture to look after the wounded man and so went downstairs.

The King, the queen mother, Tavannes, and the principal Catholics were already mounted. Marguerite cast a rapid glance over the group, which was composed of about a score of persons; the King of Navarre was not of the party.

Madame de Sauve was there. Marguerite exchanged a glance with her, and was convinced that her husband's mistress had something to tell her.

They rode down the Rue de l'Astruce and entered into the Rue Saint Honoré. As the populace caught sight of the King, Queen Catharine, and the principal Catholics they flocked together and followed the procession like a rising tide, and shouts rent the air.

"*Vive le Roi!*"

"*Vive la Messe.*"

"Death to the Huguenots!"

These acclamations were accompanied by the waving of ensanguined swords and smoking arquebuses, which showed the part each had taken in the awful work just accomplished.

When they reached the top of the Rue des Prouvelles they met some men who were dragging a headless carcass. It was the admiral's. The men were going to hang it by the feet at Montfaucon.

They entered the Cemetery des Saints Innocents by the gate facing the Rue des Chaps, now known as the Rue des Déchargeurs; the clergy, notified in advance of the visit of the King and the queen mother, were waiting for their majesties to make them speeches.

Madame de Sauve took advantage of a moment when Catharine was listening to one of the discourses to approach the Queen of Navarre, and beg leave to kiss her hand. Marguerite extended her arm toward her, and Madame de Sauve, as she kissed the queen's hand, slipped a tiny roll of paper up her sleeve.

Madame de Sauve drew back quickly and with clever dissimulation; yet Catharine perceived it, and turned round just as the maid of honor was kissing Marguerite's hand.

The two women saw her glance, which penetrated them like a flash of lightning, but both remained unmoved; only Madame de Sauve left Marguerite and resumed her place near Catharine.

When Catharine had finished replying to the address which had just been made to her she smiled and beckoned the Queen of Navarre to go to her.

"Eh, my daughter," said the queen mother, in her Italian patois, "so you are on intimate terms with Madame de Sauve, are you?"

Marguerite smiled in turn, and gave to her lovely countenance the bitterest expression she could, and replied:

"Yes, mother; the serpent came to bite my hand!"

"Aha!" replied Catharine, with a smile; "you are jealous, I think!"

"You are mistaken, madame," replied Marguerite; "I am no more jealous of the King of Navarre than the King of Navarre is in love with me, but I know how to distinguish my

friends from my enemies. I like those that like me, and detest those that hate me. Otherwise, madame, should I be your daughter?"

Catharine smiled so as to make Marguerite understand that if she had had any suspicion it had vanished.

Moreover, at that instant the arrival of other pilgrims attracted the attention of the august throng.

The Duc de Guise came with a troop of gentlemen all warm still from recent carnage. They escorted a richly decorated litter, which stopped in front of the King.

"The Duchesse de Nevers!" cried Charles IX., "Ah! let that lovely robust Catholic come and receive our compliments. Why, they tell me, cousin, that from your own window you have been hunting Huguenots, and that you killed one with a stone."

The Duchesse de Nevers blushed exceedingly red.

"Sire," she said in a low tone, and kneeling before the King, "on the contrary, it was a wounded Catholic whom I had the good fortune to rescue."

"Good — good, my cousin! there are two ways of serving me: one is by exterminating my enemies, the other is by rescuing my friends. One does what one can, and I am certain that if you could have done more you would!"

While this was going on, the populace, seeing the harmony existing between the house of Lorraine and Charles IX., shouted exultantly:

"*Vive le Roi!*"

"*Vive le Duc de Guise!*"

"*Vive la Messe!*"

"Do you return to the Louvre with us, Henriette?" inquired the queen mother of the lovely duchess.

Marguerite touched her friend on the elbow, and she, understanding the sign, replied:

"No, madame, unless your majesty desire it; for I have business in the city with her majesty the Queen of Navarre."

"And what are you going to do together?" inquired Catharine.

"To see some very rare and curious Greek books found at an old Protestant pastor's, and which have been taken to the Tower of Saint Jacques la Boucherie," replied Marguerite.

"You would do much better to see the last Huguenots flung into the Seine from the top of the Pont des Meuniers," said Charles IX.; "that is the place for all good Frenchmen."

"We will go, if it be your Majesty's desire," replied the Duchesse de Nevers.

Catharine cast a look of distrust on the two young women. Marguerite, on the watch, remarked it, and turning round uneasily, looked about her.

This assumed or real anxiety did not escape Catharine.

"What are you looking for?"

"I am seeking — I do not see" — she replied.

"Whom are you seeking? Who is it you fail to see?"

"La Sauve," said Marguerite; "can she have returned to the Louvre?"

"Did I not say you were jealous?" said Catharine, in her daughter's ear. "Oh, *bestia!* Come, come, Henriette," she added, shrugging her shoulders, "begone, and take the Queen of Navarre with you."

Marguerite pretended to be still looking about her; then, turning to her friend, she said in a whisper:

"Take me away quickly; I have something of the greatest importance to say to you."

The duchess courtesied to the King and queen mother, and then, bowing low before the Queen of Navarre:

"Will your majesty deign to come into my litter?"

"Willingly, only you will have to take me back to the Louvre."

"My litter, like my servants and myself, are at your majesty's orders."

Queen Marguerite entered the litter, while Catharine and her gentlemen returned to the Louvre just as they had come. But during the route it was observed that the queen mother kept talking to the King, pointing several times to Madame de Sauve, and at each time the King laughed — as Charles IX. laughed; that is, with a laugh more sinister than a threat.

As soon as Marguerite felt the litter in motion, and had no longer to fear Catharine's searching eyes, she quickly drew from her sleeve Madame de Sauve's note and read as follows:

"*I have received orders to send to-night to the King of Navarre two keys; one is that of the room in which he is shut up, and the other is the key of my chamber; when once he has reached my apartment, I am enjoined to keep him there until six o'clock in the morning.*

"*Let your majesty reflect — let your majesty decide. Let your majesty esteem my life as nothing.*"

"There is now no doubt," murmured Marguerite, "and the poor woman is the tool of which they wish to make use to destroy us all. But we will see if the Queen Margot, as my brother Charles calls me, is so easily to be made a nun of."

"Tell me, whom is the letter from?" asked the Duchesse de Nevers.

"Ah, duchess, I have so many things to say to you!" replied Marguerite, tearing the note into a thousand bits.

CHAPTER XII.

MUTUAL CONFIDENCES.

"And, first, where are we going?" asked Marguerite; "not to the Pont des Meuniers, I suppose, — I have seen enough slaughter since yesterday, my poor Henriette."

"I have taken the liberty to conduct your majesty"—

"First and foremost, my majesty requests you to forget my majesty — you were taking me"—

"To the Hôtel de Guise, unless you decide otherwise."

"No, no, let us go there, Henriette; the Duc de Guise is not there, your husband is not there."

"Oh, no," cried the duchess, her bright emerald eyes sparkling with joy; "no, neither my husband, nor my brother-in-law, nor any one else. I am free — free as air, free as a bird, — free, my queen! Do you understand the happiness there is in that word? I go, I come, I command. Ah, poor queen, you are not free — and so you sigh."

"You go, you come, you command. Is that all? Is that all the use of liberty? You are happy with only freedom as an excuse!"

"Your majesty promised to tell me a secret."

"Again 'your majesty'! I shall be angry soon, Henriette. Have you forgotten our agreement?"

"No; your respectful servant in public — in private, your madcap confidante, is it not so, madame? Is it not so, Marguerite?"

"Yes, yes," said the queen, smiling.

"No family rivalry, no treachery in love; everything fair, open, and aboveboard! An offensive and defensive alliance,

for the sole purpose of finding and, if we can, catching on the fly, that ephemeral thing called happiness."

"Just so, duchess. Let us again seal the compact with a kiss."

And the two beautiful women, the one so pale, so full of melancholy, the other so roseate, so fair, so animated, joined their lips as they had united their thoughts.

"Tell me, what is there new?" asked the duchess, giving Marguerite an eager, inquisitive look.

"Isn't everything new since day before yesterday?"

"Oh, I am speaking of love, not of politics. When we are as old as dame Catharine we will take part in politics; but we are only twenty, my pretty queen, and so let us talk about something else. Let me see! can it be that you are really married?"

"To whom?" asked Marguerite, laughing.

"Ah! you reassure me, truly!"

"Well, Henriette, that which reassures you, alarms me. Duchess, I must be married."

"When?"

"To-morrow."

"Oh, poor little friend! and is it necessary?"

"Absolutely."

"*Mordi!* as an acquaintance of mine says, this is very sad."

"And so you know some one who says *mordi?*" asked Marguerite, with a smile.

"Yes."

"And who is this some one?"

"You keep asking me questions when I am talking to you. Finish and I will begin."

"In two words, it is this: The King of Navarre is in love, and not with me; I am not in love, but I do not want him, yet we must both of us change, or seem to change, between now and to-morrow."

"Well, then, you change, and be very sure he will do the same."

"That is quite impossible, for I am less than ever inclined to change."

"Only with respect to your husband, I hope."

"Henriette, I have a scruple."

"A scruple! about what?"

"A religious one. Do you make any difference between Huguenots and Catholics?"

"In politics?"

"Yes."

"Of course."

"And in love?"

"My dear girl, we women are such heathens that we admit every kind of sect, and recognize many gods."

"In one, eh?"

"Yes," replied the duchess, her eyes sparkling; "he who is called *Eros, Cupido, Amor.* He who has a quiver on his back, wings on his shoulders, and a fillet over his eyes. *Mordi, vive la dévotion!*"

"You have a peculiar method of praying; you throw stones on the heads of Huguenots."

"Let us do our duty and let people talk. Ah, Marguerite! how the finest ideas, the noblest actions, are spoilt in passing through the mouths of the vulgar!"

"The vulgar! — why, it was my brother Charles who congratulated you on your exploits, was n't it?"

"Your brother Charles is a mighty hunter blowing the horn all day, and that makes him very thin. I reject his compliments; besides, I gave him his answer — did n't you hear what I said?"

"No; you spoke so low."

"So much the better. I shall have more news to tell you. Now, then, finish your story, Marguerite."

"I was going to say — to say" —

"Well?"

"I was going to say," continued the queen, laughing, "if the stone my brother spoke of be a fact, I should resist."

"Ah!" cried Henriette, "so you have chosen a Huguenot, have you? Well, to reassure your conscience, I promise you that I will choose one myself on the first opportunity."

"Ah, so you have chosen a Catholic, have you?"

"*Mordi!*" replied the duchess.

"I see, I see."

"And what is this Huguenot of yours?"

"I did not choose him. The young man is nothing and probably never will be anything to me."

"But what sort is he? You can tell me that; you know how curious I am about these matters."

"A poor young fellow, beautiful as Benvenuto Cellini's Nisus, — and he came and took refuge in my room."

"Oho! — of course without any suggestion on your part?"

"Poor fellow! Do not laugh so, Henriette; at this very moment he is between life and death."

"He is ill, is he?"

"He is grievously wounded."

"A wounded Huguenot is very disagreeable, especially in these times; and what have you done with this wounded Huguenot, who is not and never will be anything to you?"

"He is in my closet; I am concealing him and I want to save him."

"He is handsome! he is young! he is wounded. You hide him in your closet; you want to save him. This Huguenot of yours will be very ungrateful if he is not too grateful."

"I am afraid he is already — much more so than I could wish."

"And this poor young man interests you?"

"From motives of humanity — that's all."

"Ah, humanity! my poor queen, that is the very virtue that is the ruin of all of us women."

"Yes; and you understand: as the King, the Duc d'Alençon, my mother, even my husband, may at any moment enter my room" —

"You want me to hide your little Huguenot as long as he is ill, on condition I send him back to you when he is cured?"

"Scoffer!" said Marguerite, "no! I do not lay my plans so far in advance; but if you could conceal the poor fellow, — if you could preserve the life I have saved, — I confess I should be most grateful. You are free at the Hôtel de Guise; you have neither brother-in-law nor husband to spy on you or constrain you; besides, behind your room there is a closet like mine into which no one is entitled to enter; so lend me your closet for my Huguenot, and when he is cured open the cage and let the bird fly away."

"There is only one difficulty, my dear queen: the cage is already occupied."

"What, have *you* also saved somebody?"

"That is exactly what I answered your brother with."

"Ah, I understand! that's why you spoke so low that I could not hear you."

"Listen, Marguerite: it is an admirable story — is no less

poetical and romantic than yours. After I had left you six of my guards, I returned with the rest to the Hôtel de Guise, and I was watching them pillage and burn a house separated from my brother's palace only by the Rue des Quatre Fils, when I heard the voices of men swearing and of women crying. I went out on the balcony and the first thing I saw was a sword flashing so brilliantly that it seemed to light up the whole scene. I was filled with admiration for this fiery sword. I am fond of fine things, you know! Then naturally enough I tried to distinguish the arm wielding it and then the body to which the arm belonged. Amid sword-thrusts and shouts I at last made out the man and I saw — a hero, an Ajax Telemon. I heard a voice — the voice of a Stentor. My enthusiasm awoke — I stood there panting, trembling at every blow aimed at him, at every thrust he parried! That was a quarter hour of emotion such as I had never before experienced, my queen; and never believed was possible to experience. So there I was panting, holding my breath, trembling, and voiceless, when all of a sudden my hero disappeared."

"How?"

"Struck down by a stone an old woman threw at him. Then, like Cyrus, I found my voice, and screamed, 'Help! help!' my guards went out, lifted him up, and bore him to the room which you want for your *protégé*."

"Alas, my dear Henriette, I can better understand this story because it is so nearly my own."

"With this difference, queen, that as I am serving my King and my religion, I have no reason to send Monsieur Annibal de Coconnas away."

"His name is Annibal de Coconnas!" said Marguerite, laughing.

"A terrible name, is it not? Well, he who bears it is worthy of it. What a champion he is, by Heaven! and how he made the blood flow! Put on your mask, my queen, for we are now at the palace."

"Why put on my mask?"

"Because I wish to show you my hero."

"Is he handsome?"

"He seemed magnificent to me during the conflict. To be sure, it was at night and he was lighted up by the flames. This morning by daylight I confess he seemed to me to have lost a little."

"So then my *protégé* is rejected at the Hôtel de Guise. I am sorry for it, for that is the last place where they would look for a Huguenot."

"Oh, no, your Huguenot shall come; I will have him brought this evening: one shall sleep in the right-hand corner of the closet and the other in the left."

"But when they recognize each other as Protestant and Catholic they will fight."

"Oh, there is no danger. Monsieur de Coconnas has had a cut down the face that prevents him from seeing very well; your Huguenot is wounded in the chest so that he can't move; and, besides, you have only to tell him to be silent on the subject of religion, and all will go well."

"So be it."

"It's a bargain; and now let us go in."

"Thanks," said Marguerite, pressing her friend's hand.

"Here, madame," said the duchess, "you are again 'your majesty;' suffer me, then, to do the honors of the Hôtel de Guise fittingly for the Queen of Navarre."

And the duchess, alighting from the litter, almost knelt on the ground in helping Marguerite to step down; then pointing to the palace door guarded by two sentinels, arquebuse in hand, she followed the queen at a respectful distance, and this humble attitude she maintained as long as she was in sight.

As soon as she reached her room, the duchess closed the door, and, calling to her waiting-woman, a thorough Sicilian, said to her in Italian,

"Mica, how is Monsieur le Comte?"

"Better and better," replied she.

"What is he doing?"

"At this moment, madame, he is taking some refreshment."

"It is always a good sign," said Marguerite, "when the appetite returns."

"Ah, that is true. I forgot you were a pupil of Ambroise Paré. Leave us, Mica."

"Why do you send her away?"

"That she may be on the watch."

Mica left the room.

"Now," said the duchess, "will you go in to see him, or shall I send for him here?"

"Neither the one nor the other. I wish to see him without his seeing me."

"What matters it? You have your mask."

"He may recognize me by my hair, my hands, a jewel."

"How cautious she is since she has been married, my pretty queen!"

Marguerite smiled.

"Well," continued the duchess, "I see only one way."

"What is that?"

"To look through the keyhole."

"Very well! take me to the door."

The duchess took Marguerite by the hand and led her to a door covered with tapestry; then bending one knee, she applied her eye to the keyhole.

"'T is all right; he is sitting at table, with his face turned toward us; come!"

The queen took her friend's place, and looked through the keyhole; Coconnas, as the duchess had said, was sitting at a well-served table, and, despite his wounds, was doing ample justice to the good things before him.

"Ah, great heavens!" cried Marguerite, starting back.

"What is the matter?" asked the duchess in amazement.

"Impossible! — no! — yes! — on my soul, 't is the very man!"

"Who?"

"Hush," said Marguerite, getting to her feet and seizing the duchess's hand; "'t is the man who pursued my Huguenot into my room, and stabbed him in my arms! Oh, Henriette, how fortunate he did not see me!"

"Well, then, you have seen him fighting; was he not handsome?"

"I do not know," said Marguerite, "for I was looking at the man he was pursuing."

"What is his name?"

"You will not mention it before the count?"

"No, I give you my promise!"

"Lerac de la Mole."

"And what do you think of him now?"

"Of Monsieur de la Mole?"

"No, of Monsieur de Coconnas?"

"Faith!" said Marguerite, "I confess I think" —

She stopped.

"Come, come," said the duchess, "I see you are angry with him for having wounded your Huguenot."

"Why, so far," said Marguerite, laughing, "my Huguenot owes him nothing; the slash he gave him under his eye" —

"They are quits, then, and we can reconcile them. Send me your wounded man."

"Not now — by and by."

"When?"

"When you have found yours another room."

"Which?"

Marguerite looked meaningly at her friend, who, after a moment's silence, laughed.

"So be it," said the duchess; "alliance firmer than ever."

"Friendship ever sincere!"

"And the word, in case we need each other?"

"The triple name of your triple god, '*Eros, Cupido, Amor.*'"

And the two princesses separated after one more kiss, and pressing each other's hand for the twentieth time.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW THERE ARE KEYS WHICH OPEN DOORS THEY ARE NOT MEANT FOR.

The Queen of Navarre on her return to the Louvre found Gillonne in great excitement. Madame de Sauve had been there in her absence. She had brought a key sent her by the queen mother. It was the key of the room in which Henry was confined. It was evident that the queen mother for some purpose of her own wished the Béarnais to spend that night in Madame de Sauve's apartment.

Marguerite took the key and turned it over and over; she made Gillonne repeat Madame de Sauve's every word, weighed them, letter by letter, in her mind, and at length thought she detected Catharine's plan.

She took pen and ink, and wrote:

"*Instead of going to Madame de Sauve to-night, come to the Queen of Navarre.*

"*Marguerite.*"

She rolled up the paper, put it in the hollow of the key, and ordered Gillonne to slip the key under the king's door as soon as it was dark.

This first duty having been attended to, Marguerite thought of the wounded man, closed all the doors, entered the closet, and, to her great surprise, found La Mole dressed in all his clothes, torn and blood-stained as they were.

On seeing her he strove to rise, but, still dizzy, could not stand, and fell back upon the sofa which had served for his bed.

"What is the matter, sir?" asked Marguerite; "and why do you thus disobey your physician's orders? I recommended you rest, and instead of following my advice you do just the contrary."

"Oh, madame," said Gillonne, "it is not my fault; I have entreated Monsieur le Comte not to commit this folly, but he declares that nothing shall keep him any longer at the Louvre."

"Leave the Louvre!" said Marguerite, gazing with astonishment at the young man, who cast down his eyes. "Why, it is impossible — you cannot walk; you are pale and weak; your knees tremble. Only a few hours ago the wound in your shoulder was still bleeding."

"Madame," said the young man, "as earnestly as I thanked your majesty for having given me shelter, as earnestly do I pray you now to suffer me to depart."

"I scarcely know what to call such a resolution," said Marguerite; "it is worse than ingratitude."

"Oh," cried La Mole, clasping his hands, "think me not ungrateful; my gratitude will cease only with my life."

"It will not last long, then," said Marguerite, moved at these words, the sincerity of which it was impossible to doubt; "for your wounds will open, and you will die from loss of blood, or you will be recognized for a Huguenot and killed ere you have gone fifty yards in the street."

"Nevertheless I must leave the Louvre," murmured La Mole.

"Must," returned Marguerite, fixing her serene, inscrutable eyes upon him; then turning rather pale she added, "ah, yes; forgive me, sir, I understand; doubtless there is some one outside the Louvre who is anxiously waiting for you. You are right, Monsieur de la Mole; it is natural, and I understand it. Why didn't you say so at first? or rather, why didn't I think of it myself? It is duty in the exercise of hospitality to protect one's guest's affections as well as to cure his wounds, and to care for the spirit just as one cares for the body."

"Alas, madame," said La Mole, "you are laboring under a strange mistake. I am well nigh alone in the world, and altogether so in Paris, where no one knows me. My assassin is the first man I have spoken to in this city; your majesty the first woman who has spoken to me."

"Then," said Marguerite, "why would you go?"

"Because," replied La Mole, "last night you got no rest, and to-night" —

Marguerite blushed.

"Gillonne," said she, "it is already evening and time to deliver that key."

Gillonne smiled, and left the room.

"But," continued Marguerite, "if you are alone in Paris, without friends, what will you do?"

"Madame, I soon shall have friends enough, for while I was pursued I thought of my mother, who was a Catholic; methought I saw her with a cross in her hand gliding before me toward the Louvre, and I vowed that if God should save my life I would embrace my mother's religion. Madame, God did more than save my life, he sent me one of his angels to make me love life."

"But you cannot walk; before you have gone a hundred steps you will faint away."

"Madame, I have made the experiment in the closet, I walk slowly and painfully, it is true; but let me get as far as the Place du Louvre; once outside, let befall what will."

Marguerite leaned her head on her hand and sank into deep thought.

"And the King of Navarre," said she, significantly, "you no longer speak of him? In changing your religion, have you also changed your desire to enter his service?"

"Madame," replied La Mole, growing pale, "you have just hit upon the actual reason of my departure. I know that the King of Navarre is exposed to the greatest danger, and that all your majesty's influence as a daughter of France will barely suffice to save his life."

"What do you mean, sir," exclaimed Marguerite, "and what danger do you refer to?"

"Madame," replied La Mole, with some hesitation, "one can hear everything from the closet where I am."

"'T is true," said Marguerite to herself; "Monsieur de Guise told me so before."

"Well," added she, aloud, "what did you hear?"

"In the first place, the conversation between your majesty and your brother."

"With François?" said Marguerite, changing color.

"Yes, madame, with the Duc d'Alençon; and then after you went out I heard what Gillonne and Madame de Sauve said."

"And these two conversations" —

"Yes, madame; married scarcely a week, you love your husband; your husband will come, in his turn, in the same way that the Duc d'Alençon and Madame de Sauve came. He will confide his secrets to you. Well, then, I must not overhear them; I should be indiscreet —I cannot — I must not — I will not be!"

By the tone in which La Mole uttered these last words, by the anxiety expressed in his voice, by the embarrassment shown in his eyes, Marguerite was enlightened as by a sudden revelation.

"Aha!" said she, "so you have heard everything that has been said in this room?"

"Yes, madame."

These words were uttered in a sigh.

"And you wish to depart to-night, this evening, to avoid hearing any more?"

"This moment, if it please your majesty to allow me to go."

"Poor fellow!" said Marguerite, with a strange accent of tender pity.

Astonished by such a gentle reply when he was expecting a rather forcible outburst, La Mole timidly raised his head; his eyes met Marguerite's and were riveted as by a magnetic power on their clear and limpid depths.

"So then you feel you cannot keep a secret, Monsieur de la Mole?" said Marguerite in a soft voice as she stood leaning on the back of her chair, half hidden in the shadow of a thick tapestry and enjoying the felicity of easily reading his frank and open soul while remaining impenetrable herself.

"Madame," said La Mole, "I have a miserable disposition: I distrust myself, and the happiness of another gives me pain."

"Whose happiness?" asked Marguerite, smiling. "Ah, yes — the King of Navarre's! Poor Henry!"

"You see," cried La Mole, passionately, "he is happy."

"Happy?"

"Yes, for your majesty is sorry for him."

Marguerite crumpled up the silk of her purse and smoothed out the golden fringe.

"So then you decline to see the King of Navarre?" said she; "you have made up your mind; you are decided?"

"I fear I should be troublesome to his majesty just at the present time."

"But the Duc d'Alençon, my brother?"

"Oh, no, madame!" cried La Mole, "the Duc d'Alençon even still less than the King of Navarre."

"Why so?" asked Marguerite, so stirred that her voice trembled as she spoke.

"Because, although I am already too bad a Huguenot to be a faithful servant of the King of Navarre, I am not a sufficiently good Catholic to be friends with the Duc d'Alençon and Monsieur de Guise."

This time Marguerite cast down her eyes, for she felt the very depths of her heart stirred by what he said, and yet she could not have told whether his reply was meant to give her joy or pain.

At this moment Gillonne came back. Marguerite asked her a question with a glance; Gillonne's answer, also conveyed by her eyes, was in the affirmative. She had succeeded in getting the key to the King of Navarre.

Marguerite turned her eyes toward La Mole, who stood before her, his head drooping on his breast, pale, like one suffering alike in mind and in body.

"Monsieur de la Mole is proud," said she, "and I hesitate to make him a proposition he will doubtless reject."

La Mole rose, took one step toward Marguerite, and was about to bow low before her to signify that he was at her service; but an intense, keen, burning pang forced the tears from his eyes, and conscious that he was in danger of falling, he clutched a piece of tapestry and clung to it.

"Don't you see, sir," cried Marguerite, springing to him and supporting him in her arms, "don't you see that you still need me?"

A scarcely perceptible movement passed over La Mole's lips.

"Oh, yes!" he whispered, "like the air I breathe, like the light I see!"

At this moment three knocks were heard at Marguerite's door.

"Do you hear, madame?" cried Gillonne, alarmed.

"Already!" exclaimed Marguerite.

"Shall I open?"

"Wait! perhaps it is the King of Navarre."

"Oh, madame!" cried La Mole, recalled to himself by these words, which the queen had spoken in such a low tone that she hoped Gillonne only had heard them, "on my knees I entreat you, let me depart. Yes, dead or alive! madame, have pity on me! Oh! you do not answer. I will tell you all, and then you will drive me away, I hope."

"Be silent," said Marguerite, who found an indescribable charm in the young man's reproaches; "be silent."

"Madame," replied La Mole, who did not find that anger he expected in the voice of the queen, "madame, I tell you again, everything is audible in this closet. Oh, do not make me perish by tortures more cruel than the executioner could inflict" —

"Silence! silence!" said Marguerite.

"Oh, madame, you are merciless! you will not hear me, you will not understand me. Know, then, that I love you" —

"Silence! I tell you," interrupted Marguerite, placing on his mouth her warm, perfumed hand, which he seized between both of his and pressed eagerly to his lips.

"But" — he whispered.

"Be silent, child — who is this rebel that refuses to obey his queen?"

Then darting out of the closet, she shut the door and stood leaning against the wall pressing her trembling hand to her heart, as if to control it.

"Open, Gillonne."

Gillonne left the room, and an instant after, the fine, intellectual, but rather anxious countenance of the King of Navarre appeared behind the tapestry.

"You have sent for me, madame?"

"Yes, sire. Your majesty received my letter?"

"And not without some surprise, I confess," said Henry, looking round with distrust, which, however, almost instantly vanished from his mind.

"And not without some apprehension," added Marguerite.

"I confess it, madame! But still, surrounded as I am by deadly enemies, by friends still more dangerous, perhaps, than my open foes, I recollected that one evening I had seen a noble generosity shining in your eyes — 't was the night of our

marriage; that one other evening I had seen the star of courage beaming in them — 't was yesterday, the day fixed for my death."

"Well, sire?" said Marguerite, smiling, while Henry seemed striving to read her heart.

"Well, madame," returned the king, "thinking of these things, I said to myself, as I read your letter bidding me come: 'Without friends, for he is a disarmed prisoner, the King of Navarre has but one means of dying nobly, of dying a death that will be recorded in history. It is to die betrayed by his wife; and I am come'" —

"Sire," replied Marguerite, "you will change your tone when you learn that all this is the work of a woman who loves you — and whom you love."

Henry started back at these words, and his keen gray eyes under their black lashes were fixed on the queen with curiosity.

"Oh, reassure yourself, sire," said the queen, smiling; "I am not that person."

"But, madame," said Henry, "you sent me this key, and this is your writing."

"It is my writing, I confess; the letter came from me, but the key is a different matter. Let it satisfy you to know that it has passed through the hands of four women before it reached you."

"Of four women?" exclaimed Henry in astonishment.

"Yes," said Marguerite; "Queen Catharine's, Madame de Sauve's, Gillonne's, and mine."

Henry pondered over this enigma.

"Now let us talk reasonably, sire," said Marguerite, "and above all let us speak frankly. Common report has it that your majesty has consented to abjure. Is it true?"

"That report is mistaken; I have not yet consented."

"But your mind is made up?"

"That is to say, I am deliberating. When one is twenty and almost a king, *ventre saint gris!* there are many things well worth a mass."

"And among other things life, for instance!"

Henry could not repress a fleeting smile.

"You do not tell me your whole thought," said Marguerite.

"I have reservations for my allies, madame; and you know we are but allies as yet; if indeed you were both my ally — and" —

"And your wife, sire?"

"Faith! yes, and my wife" —

"What then?"

"Why, then, it might be different, and I perhaps might resolve to remain King of the Huguenots, as they call me. But as it is, I must be content to live."

Marguerite looked at Henry in such a peculiar manner that it would have awakened suspicion in a less acute mind than his.

"And are you quite sure of succeeding even in that?" she asked.

"Why, almost; but you know, in this world nothing is certain."

"It is true," replied Marguerite, "your majesty shows such moderation and professes such disinterestedness, that after having renounced your crown, after having renounced your religion, you will probably renounce your alliance with a daughter of France; at least this is hoped for."

These words bore a significance which sent a thrill through Henry's whole frame; but instantaneously repressing the emotion, he said:

"Deign to recollect, madame, that at this moment I am not my own master; I shall therefore do what the King of France orders me. If I were consulted the least in the world on this question, affecting as it does my throne, my honor, and my life, rather than build my future on this forced marriage of ours, I should prefer to enter a monastery or turn gamekeeper."

This calm resignation, this renunciation of the world, alarmed Marguerite. She thought perhaps this rupture of the marriage had been agreed upon by Charles IX., Catharine, and the King of Navarre. Why should she not be taken as a dupe or a victim? Because she was sister of the one and daughter of the other? Experience had taught her that this relationship gave her no ground on which to build her security.

So ambition was gnawing at this young woman's, or rather this young queen's heart, and she was too far above vulgar frailties to be drawn into any selfish meanness; in the case of every woman, however mediocre she may be, when she loves her love has none of these petty trials, for true love is also an ambition.

"Your majesty," said Marguerite, with a sort of mocking disdain, "has no confidence in the star that shines over the head of every king!"

"Ah," said Henry, "I vainly look for mine now, I cannot see it; 't is hidden by the storm which now threatens me!"

"And suppose a woman's breath were to dispel this tempest, and make the star reappear, brilliant as ever?"

"'T were difficult."

"Do you deny the existence of this woman?"

"No, I deny her power."

"You mean her will?"

"I said her power, and I repeat, her power. A woman is powerful only when love and interest are combined within her in equal degrees; if either sentiment predominates, she is, like Achilles, vulnerable; now as to this woman, if I mistake not, I cannot rely on her love."

Marguerite made no reply.

"Listen," said Henry; "at the last stroke of the bell of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois you must have thought of regaining your liberty, sacrificed for the purpose of destroying my followers. My concern was to save my life: that was the most essential thing. We lose Navarre, indeed; but what is that compared with your being enabled to speak aloud in your room, which you dared not do when you had some one listening to you in yonder closet?"

Deeply absorbed as she was in her thoughts, Marguerite could not refrain from smiling. The king rose and prepared to seek his own apartment, for it was some time after eleven, and every one at the Louvre was, or seemed to be, asleep.

Henry took three steps toward the door, then suddenly stopped as if for the first time recollecting the motive of his visit to the queen.

"By the way, madame," said he, "had you not something to communicate to me? or did you desire to give me an opportunity of thanking you for the reprieve which your brave presence in the King's armory brought me? In truth it was just in time, madame; I cannot deny it, you appeared like a goddess of antiquity, in the nick of time to save my life."

"Unfortunate man!" cried Marguerite, in a muffled voice, and seizing her husband's arm, "do you not see that nothing is saved, neither your liberty, your crown, nor your life? Infatuated madman! Poor madman! Did you, then, see nothing in my letter but a rendezvous? Did you believe that Marguerite, indignant at your coldness, desired reparation?"

"I confess, madame," said Henry in astonishment, "I confess" —

Marguerite shrugged her shoulders with an expression impossible to describe.

At this instant a strange sound was heard, like a sharp insistent scratching at the secret door.

Marguerite led the king toward the little door.

"Listen," said she.

"The queen mother is leaving her room," said a trembling voice outside, which Henry instantly recognized as Madame de Sauve's.

"Where is she going?" asked Marguerite.

"She is coming to your majesty."

And then the rustling of a silk gown, growing fainter, showed that Madame de Sauve was hastening rapidly away.

"Oho!" exclaimed Henry.

"I was sure of this," said Marguerite.

"And I," replied Henry, "feared it, and this is the proof of it."

And half opening his black velvet doublet, he showed the queen that he had beneath it a shirt of mail, and a long Milan poniard, which instantly glittered in his hand like a viper in the sun.

"As if you needed weapon and cuirass here!" cried Marguerite. "Quick, quick, sire! conceal that dagger; 't is the queen mother, indeed, but the queen mother only."

"Yet" —

"Silence! — I hear her."

And putting her mouth close to Henry's ear, she whispered something which the young king heard with attention mingled with astonishment. Then he hid himself behind the curtains of the bed.

Meantime, with the quickness of a panther, Marguerite sprang to the closet, where La Mole was waiting in a fever of excitement, opened the door, found the young man, and pressing his hand in the darkness — "Silence," said she, approaching her lips so near that he felt her warm and balmy breath; "silence!"

Then returning to her chamber, she tore off her head-dress, cut the laces of her dress with her poniard, and sprang into bed.

It was time — the key turned in the lock. Catharine had a key for every door in the Louvre.

"Who is there?" cried Marguerite, as Catharine placed on guard at the door the four gentlemen by whom she was attended.

And, as if frightened by this sudden intrusion into her chamber, Marguerite sprang out from behind the curtains of her bed in a white dressing-gown, and then recognizing Catharine, came to kiss her hand with such well-feigned surprise that the wily Florentine herself could not help being deceived by it.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SECOND MARRIAGE NIGHT.

The queen mother cast a marvellously rapid glance around her. The velvet slippers at the foot of the bed, Marguerite's clothes scattered over the chairs, the way she rubbed her eyes as if to drive away her sleepiness, all convinced Catharine that she had awakened her daughter.

Then she smiled as a woman does when she has succeeded in her plans, and drawing up an easy chair, she said:

"Let us sit down, Marguerite, and talk."

"Madame, I am listening."

"It is time," said Catharine, slowly shutting her eyes in the characteristic way of people who weigh each word or who deeply dissimulate, "it is time, my daughter, that you should know how ardently your brother and myself desire to see you happy."

This exordium for one who knew Catharine was alarming.

"What can she be about to say?" thought Marguerite.

"To be sure," continued La Florentine, "in giving you in marriage we fulfilled one of those acts of policy frequently required by important interests of those who govern; but I must confess, my poor child, that we had no expectation that the indifference manifested by the King of Navarre for one so young, so lovely, and so fascinating as yourself would be so obstinate."

Marguerite arose, and folding her robe de chambre around her, courtesied with ceremonious respect to her mother.

"I have heard to-night only," continued Catharine, "otherwise I should have paid you an earlier visit, that your hus-

band is far from showing you those attentions you have a right to claim, not merely as a beautiful woman, but as a princess of France."

Marguerite sighed, and Catharine, encouraged by this mute approval proceeded.

"In fact, that the King of Navarre is openly cohabiting one of my maids of honor who is scandalously smitten with him, that he scorns the love of the woman graciously given to him, is an insult to which we poor powerful ones of the earth cannot apply a remedy, and yet the meanest gentleman in our kingdom would avenge it by calling out his son-in-law or having his son do so."

Marguerite dropped her head.

"For some time, my daughter," Catharine went on to say, "I have seen by your reddened eyes, by your bitter sallies against La Sauve, that in spite of your efforts your heart must show external signs of its bleeding wound."

Marguerite trembled: a slight movement had shaken the curtains; but fortunately Catharine did not notice it.

"This wound," said she with affectionate sweetness redoubled, "this wound, my daughter, a mother's hand must cure. Those who with the intention of securing your happiness have brought about your marriage, and who in their anxiety about you notice that every night Henry of Navarre goes to the wrong rooms; those who cannot allow a kinglet like him to insult a woman of such beauty, of such high rank, and so worthy, by scorning your person and neglecting his chances of posterity; those who see that at the first favorable wind, this wild and insolent madcap will turn against our family and expel you from his house — I say have not they the right to secure your interests by entirely dividing them from his, so that your future may be better suited to yourself and your rank?"

"And yet, madame," replied Marguerite, "in spite of these observations so replete with maternal love, and filling me with joy and pride, I am bold enough to affirm to your majesty that the King of Navarre is my husband."

Catharine started with rage, and drawing closer to Marguerite she said:

"He, your husband? Is it sufficient to make you husband and wife that the Church has pronounced its blessing upon you? And is the marriage consecration only in the words of

the priest? He, your husband? Ah, my daughter! if you were Madame de Sauve you might give me this reply. But wholly contrary of what we expected of him since you granted Henry of Navarre the honor of calling you his wife, he has given all your rights to another woman, and at this very instant even," said Catharine, raising her voice, — "this key opens the door of Madame de Sauve's apartment — come with me and you will see" —

"Oh, not so loud, madame, not so loud, I beseech you!" said Marguerite, "for not only are you mistaken, but" —

"Well?"

"Well, you will awaken my husband!"

As she said these words Marguerite arose with a perfectly voluptuous grace, her white dress fluttering loosely around her, while the large open sleeves displayed her bare and faultlessly modelled arm and truly royal hand, and taking a rose-colored taper she held it near the bed, and drawing back the curtain, and smiling significantly at her mother, pointed to the haughty profile, the black locks, and the parted lips of the King of Navarre, who, as he lay upon the disordered bed, seemed buried in profound repose.

Pale, with haggard eyes, her body thrown back as if an abyss had opened at her feet, Catharine uttered not a cry, but a hoarse bellow.

"You see, madame," said Marguerite, "you were misinformed."

Catharine looked first at Marguerite, then at Henry. In her active mind she combined Marguerite's smile with the picture of that pale and dewy brow, those eyes circled by dark-colored rings, and she bit her thin lips in silent fury.

Marguerite allowed her mother for a moment to contemplate this picture, which affected her like the head of Medusa. Then she dropped the curtain and stepping on her tip-toes she came back to Catharine and sat down:

"You were saying, madame?" —

The Florentine for several seconds tried to fathom the young woman's naïveté; but as if her keen glance had become blunted on Marguerite's calmness, she exclaimed, "Nothing," and hastily left the room.

As soon as the sound of her departing footsteps had died away down the long corridor, the bed-curtains opened a second time, and Henry, with sparkling eyes, trembling hand, and

panting breath, came out and knelt at Marguerite's feet; he was dressed only in his short-clothes and his coat of mail, so that Marguerite, seeing him in such an odd rig, could not help laughing even while she was warmly shaking hands with him.

"Ah, madame! ah, Marguerite!" he cried, "how shall I ever repay you?"

And he covered her hand with kisses which gradually strayed higher up along her arm.

"Sire," said she, gently retreating, "can you forget that a poor woman to whom you owe your life is mourning and suffering on your account? Madame de Sauve," added she, in a lower tone, "has forgotten her jealousy in sending you to me; and to that sacrifice she may probably have to add her life, for you know better than any one how terrible is my mother's anger!"

Henry shuddered; and, rising, started to leave the room.

"Upon second thoughts," said Marguerite, with admirable coquetry, "I have thought it all over and I see no cause for alarm. The key was given to you without any directions, and it will be supposed that you granted me the preference for to-night."

"And so I do, Marguerite! Consent but to forget" —

"Not so loud, sire, not so loud!" replied the queen, employing the same words she had a few minutes before used to her mother; "any one in the adjoining closet can hear you. And as I am not yet quite free, I will ask you to speak in a lower tone."

"Oho!" said Henry, half smiling, half gloomily, "that's true! I was forgetting that I am probably not the one destined to play the end of this interesting scene! This closet" —

"Let me beg of your majesty to enter there," said Marguerite; "for I am desirous of having the honor of presenting to you a worthy gentleman, wounded during the massacre while making his way to the Louvre to apprise your majesty of the danger with which you were threatened."

The queen went toward the door, and Henry followed her. She opened it, and the king was thunderstruck at beholding a man in this cabinet, fated to reveal such continued surprises.

But La Mole was still more surprised at thus unexpectedly finding himself in the presence of Henry of Navarre. The result was that the king cast an ironical glance on Marguerite, who bore it without flinching.

"Sire," said she, "I am in dread lest this gentleman may be murdered even here, in my very chamber; he is devoted to your majesty's service, and for that reason I commend him to your royal protection."

"Sire," continued the young man, "I am the Comte Lerac de la Mole, whom your majesty was expecting; I was recommended to you by that poor Monsieur de Téligny, who was killed by my side."

"Aha!" replied Henry; "you are right, sir. The queen gave me his letter; but have you not also a letter from the governor of Languedoc?"

"Yes, sire, and I was recommended to deliver it to your majesty as soon as I arrived."

"Why did you not do so?"

"Sire, I hastened to the Louvre last evening, but your majesty was too much occupied to give me audience."

"True!" answered the king; "but I should think you might have sent the letter to me?"

"I had orders from Monsieur d'Auriac to give it to no one else but your majesty, since it contained, he said, information so important that he feared to entrust it to any ordinary messenger."

"The contents are, indeed, of a serious nature," said the king, when he had received and read the letter; "advising my instant withdrawal from the court of France, and retirement to Béarn. M. d'Auriac, although a Catholic, was always a stanch friend of mine; and it is possible that, acting as governor of a province, he got scent of what was in the wind here. *Ventre saint gris!* monsieur! why was not this letter given to me three days ago, instead of now?"

"Because, as I before assured your majesty, that using all the speed and diligence in my power, it was wholly impossible to arrive before yesterday."

"That is very unfortunate, very unfortunate," murmured the king; "we should then have been in security, either at Rochelle or in some broad plain surrounded by two or three thousand trusty horsemen."

"Sire, what is done is done," said Marguerite, in a low voice, "and instead of wasting your time complaining over the past you must do the best possible with the future."

"If you were in my place, madame," replied Henry, with his questioning look, "you would still have hope, would you?"

"Certainly I should; I should consider myself as playing a game of three points, of which I had lost only the first."

"Ah, madame," whispered Henry, "if I dared but hope that you would go partners with me in the game"—

"If I had intended to side with your adversaries," replied Marguerite, "I should scarcely have delayed so long."

"True!" replied Henry, "and I am ungrateful; and as you say, the past may still be repaired."

"Alas! sire," said La Mole, "I wish your majesty every kind of good fortune; but now the admiral is no more."

Over Henry's face passed that sly, peasant-like smile, which was not understood at court until after he became King of France.

"But, madame," said the king, attentively observing La Mole, "this gentleman cannot remain here without causing you considerable inconvenience, and being himself subject to very unpleasant surprises. What will you do with him?"

"Could we not remove him from the Louvre?" asked Marguerite, "for I entirely agree with you!"

"It will be difficult."

"Then could not Monsieur de la Mole find accommodation in your majesty's apartments?"

"Alas, madame! you speak as if I were still King of the Huguenots, and had subjects to command. You are aware that I am half converted to the Catholic faith and have no people at all."

Any one but Marguerite would have promptly answered: "He is a Catholic."

But the queen wished Henry himself to ask her to do the very thing she was desirous of effecting; while La Mole, perceiving his protectress's caution and not knowing where to set foot on the slippery ground of such a dangerous court as that of France, remained perfectly silent.

"But what is this the governor says in his letter?" said Henry, again casting his eyes over the missive he held in his hand. "He states that your mother was a Catholic, and from that circumstance originates the interest he felt in you."

"And what were you telling me, Monsieur le Comte," said Marguerite, "respecting a vow you had formed to change your religion? I confess my recollection on the subject is somewhat confused. Have the goodness to assist me, M. de la

Mole. Did not your conversation refer to something of the nature the king appears to desire?"

"Alas! madame, what I did say was so coldly received by your majesty that I did not dare" —

"Simply because it in no way concerned me," answered Marguerite. "But explain yourself to the king — explain!"

"Well, what was the vow?" asked the king.

"Sire," said La Mole, "when pursued by assassins, myself unarmed, and almost expiring from my two wounds, I fancied I beheld my mother's spirit holding a cross in her hands and guiding me to the Louvre. Then I vowed that if my life were preserved I would adopt the religion of my mother, who had been permitted to leave her grave to direct me to a place of safety during that horrible night. Heaven conducted me here, sire. I find myself here under the protection of a princess of France and of the King of Navarre; my life was miraculously saved, therefore I must fulfil my vow. I am ready to become a Catholic."

Henry frowned. Sceptic that he was, he could well understand a change of religion from motives of interest, but he distrusted abjuration through faith.

"The king does not want to take charge of my *protégé*," thought Marguerite.

La Mole still remained mute and awkward between the two opposing wills. He felt, without being able to define why, that he was in a ridiculous position. Marguerite's womanly tact came to his relief.

"Sire," said she, "we forget that the poor wounded gentleman has need of repose. I myself am half asleep. Ah, see!"

La Mole did indeed turn pale; but it was at Marguerite's last words, which he had interpreted according to his own ideas.

"Well, madame," answered Henry, "nothing can be simpler. Can we not leave Monsieur de la Mole to take his repose."

The young man fixed a supplicating look on Marguerite, and, in spite of the presence of the two majesties, sunk upon a chair, overcome with fatigue and pain.

Marguerite understood all the love in his look, all the despair in his weakness.

"Sire," said she, "your majesty is bound to confer on this young man, who imperilled his life for his king, since he received his wounds while coming hither to inform you of the

admiral's death and Téligny's, — your majesty is bound, I repeat, to confer on him an honor for which he will be grateful all his life long."

"What is it, madame?" asked Henry. "Command me, I am ready."

"Monsieur de la Mole must sleep to-night at your majesty's feet, while you, sire, can sleep on this couch. With the permission of my august spouse," added Marguerite, smiling, "I will summon Gillonne and return to bed, for I assure you I am not the least wearied of us three."

Henry had shrewd sense and a quick perception of things; friends and enemies subsequently found fault with him for possessing too much of both. He fully admitted that she who thus banished him from the nuptial bed was well justified in so doing by the indifference he had himself manifested toward her; and then, too, she had just repaid this indifference by saving his life; he therefore allowed no self-love to dictate his answer.

"Madame," said he, "if Monsieur de la Mole were able to come to my quarters I would give him my own bed."

"Yes," replied Marguerite, "but your quarters just at the present time would not be safe for either of you, and prudence dictates that your majesty should remain here until morning."

Then without awaiting the king's reply she summoned Gillonne, and bade her prepare the necessary cushions for the king, and to arrange a bed at the king's feet for La Mole, who appeared so happy and contented with the honor that one would have sworn he no longer felt his wounds.

Then Marguerite, courtesing low to the king, passed into her chamber, the door of which was well furnished with bolts, and threw herself on the bed.

"One thing is certain," said Marguerite to herself, "to-morrow Monsieur de la Mole must have a protector at the Louvre; and he who, to-night, sees and hears nothing, may change his mind to-morrow."

Then she called Gillonne, who was waiting to receive her last orders.

Gillonne came to her.

"Gillonne," said she in a whisper, "you must contrive to bring my brother the Duc d'Alençon here to-morrow morning before eight o'clock."

It was just striking two at the Louvre.

La Mole for a few moments talked on political subjects with the king, who gradually grew drowsy and was soon snoring.

La Mole might have slept as well as the king, but Marguerite was not asleep; she kept turning from side to side in her bed, and the noise she made disturbed the young man's ideas and sleep.

"He is very young," murmured Marguerite in her wakeful mood, "he is very timid; perhaps — but we must see — perhaps it will be ridiculous. Yet he has handsome eyes — and a good figure, and he is very charming; but if he should not turn out to be brave! — He ran away! — He is renouncing his faith! It is too bad — the dream began well. However, let things take their course and entrust them to that madcap Henriette's triple god."

And toward daybreak Marguerite fell asleep, murmuring: "*Eros, Cupido, Amor.*"

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT WOMAN WILLS, GOD WILLS.

MARGUERITE was not mistaken: the wrath distilled in the depths of Catharine's heart at sight of this comedy, the intrigue of which she followed without being in any way able to change its denouement, required a victim. So instead of going directly to her own room the queen mother proceeded to that of her lady in waiting.

Madame de Sauve was in expectation of two visits — one she hoped to receive from Henry, and the other she feared was in store for her from the queen mother. As she lay in her bed only partially undressed, while Dariole kept watch in the antechamber, she heard a key turn in the lock, and then slowly approaching footsteps which would have seemed heavy if they had not been deadened by thick rugs. She did not recognize Henry's light, eager step; she suspected that Dariole was prevented from coming to warn her, and so leaning on her elbow she waited with eye and ear alert. The portière was lifted and the trembling young woman saw Catharine de Médicis appear.

Catharine seemed calm; but Madame de Sauve, accustomed for two years to study her, well knew what dark designs,

and possibly cruel vengeance, might be concealed beneath that apparent calm.

At sight of Catharine, Madame de Sauve was about to spring from her bed, but Catharine signed to her to stay where she was; and poor Charlotte was fixed to the spot, inwardly endeavoring to collect all the forces of her soul to endure the storm which was silently gathering.

"Did you convey the key to the King of Navarre?" inquired Catharine, without the tone of her voice betraying any change; and yet as she spoke her lips grew paler and paler.

"I did, madame," answered Charlotte, in a voice which she vainly tried to make as firm and assured as Catherine's was.

"And have you seen him?"

"Who?" asked Madame de Sauve.

"The King of Navarre."

"No, madame; but I am expecting him, and when I heard the key turn in the lock, I firmly believed it was he."

At this answer, which indicated either perfect confidence or deep dissimulation on Madame de Sauve's part, Catharine could not repress a slight shiver. She clinched her short plump hand.

"And yet you knew perfectly well," said she with her evil smile, "you knew perfectly well, Carlotta, that the King of Navarre would not come to-night."

"I, madame? I knew that?" exclaimed Charlotte, with a tone of surprise perfectly well assumed.

"Yes, you knew it!"

"If he does not come, he must be dead!" replied the young woman, shuddering at the mere supposition.

What gave Charlotte the courage to lie so was the certainty that she would suffer from a terrible vengeance if her little treason should be discovered.

"But did you not write to the king, Carlotta mia?" inquired Catharine, with the same cruel and silent laugh.

"No, madame," answered Charlotte, with well-assumed naïveté, "I cannot recollect receiving your majesty's commands to do so."

A short silence followed, during which Catharine continued to gaze on Madame de Sauve as the serpent looks at the bird it wishes to fascinate.

"You think you are pretty," said Catharine, "you think you are clever, do you not?"

"No, madame," answered Charlotte; "I only know that sometimes your majesty has been graciously pleased to commend both my personal attractions and address."

"Well, then," said Catharine, growing eager and animated, "you were mistaken if you think so, and I lied when I told you so; you are a simpleton and hideous compared to my daughter Margot."

"Oh, madame," replied Charlotte, "that is a fact I will not even try to deny — least of all in your presence."

"So, then, the King of Navarre prefers my daughter to you; a circumstance, I presume, not to your wishes, and certainly not what we agreed should be the case."

"Alas, madame," cried Charlotte, bursting into a torrent of tears which now flowed from no feigned source, "if it be so, I can but say I am very unfortunate!"

"It is so," said Catharine, darting the two-fold keenness of her eyes like a double poniard into Madame de Sauve's heart.

"But who can make you believe that?" asked Charlotte.

"Go down to the Queen of Navarre's *pazza*, and you will find your lover there!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Madame de Sauve.

Catharine shrugged her shoulders.

"Are you jealous, pray?" asked the queen mother.

"I?" exclaimed Madame de Sauve, recalling her fast-failing strength.

"Yes, you! I should like to see a Frenchwoman's jealousy."

"But," said Madame de Sauve, "how should your majesty expect me to be jealous except out of vanity? I love the King of Navarre only as far as your majesty's service requires it."

Catharine gazed at her for a moment with dreamy eyes.

"What you tell me may on the whole be true," she murmured.

"Your majesty reads my heart."

"And your heart is wholly devoted to me?"

"Command me, madame, and you shall judge for yourself."

"Well, then, Carlotta, since you are ready to sacrifice yourself in my service, you must still continue for my sake to be in love with the King of Navarre and, above all, to be very jealous, — jealous as an Italian woman."

"But, madame," asked Charlotte, "how does an Italian woman show her jealousy?"

"I will tell you," replied Catharine, and after nodding her head two or three times she left the room as deliberately and noiselessly as she had come in.

Charlotte, confused by the keen look of those eyes dilated like a cat's or a panther's without thereby losing anything of their inscrutability, allowed her to go without uttering a single word, without even letting her breathing be heard, and she did not even take a respiration until she heard the door close behind her and Dariole came to say that the terrible apparition had departed.

"Dariole," said she, "draw up an armchair close to my bed and spend the night in it. I beg you to do so, for I should not dare to stay alone."

Dariole obeyed; but in spite of the company of her faithful attendant, who stayed near her, in spite of the light from the lamp which she commanded to be left burning for the sake of greater tranquillity, Madame de Sauve also did not fall asleep till daylight, so insistently rang in her ears the metallic accent of Catharine's voice.

Though Marguerite had not fallen asleep till daybreak she awoke at the first blast of the trumpets, at the first barking of the dogs. She instantly arose and began to put on a costume so negligent that it could not fail to attract attention. Then she summoned her women, and had the gentlemen ordinarily in attendance on the King of Navarre shown into her antechamber, and finally opening the door which shut Henry and De la Mole into the same room, she gave the count an affectionate glance and addressing her husband she said:

"Come, sire, it is not sufficient to have made madame my mother believe in what is not; it still remains for you to convince your whole court that a perfect understanding exists between us. But make yourself quite easy," added she, laughing, "and remember my words, rendered almost solemn by the circumstances. To-day will be the last time that I shall put your majesty to such a cruel test."

The King of Navarre smiled and ordered his gentlemen to be admitted.

Just as they were bowing to him he pretended suddenly to recollect having left his mantle on the queen's bed and begged their excuse for receiving them in such a way; then, taking his mantle from the hands of Marguerite, who stood blushing

by his side, he clasped it on his shoulder. Next, turning to his gentlemen, he inquired what news there was in the city and at court.

Marguerite was engaged in watching out of the corner of her eye the imperceptible signs of astonishment betrayed by the gentlemen at detecting this newly revealed intimacy between the king and queen of Navarre, when an usher entered, followed by three or four gentlemen, and announced the Duc d'Alençon.

To bring him there Gillonne had only to tell him that the king had spent the night in the queen's room.

François rushed in so precipitately that he almost upset those who preceded him. His first glance was for Henry; his next was for Marguerite.

Henry replied with a courteous bow; Marguerite composed her features so that they expressed the utmost serenity.

Then the duke cast a vague but scrutinizing look around the whole room: he saw the two pillows placed at the head of the bed, the derangement of its tapestried coverings, and the king's hat thrown on a chair.

He turned pale, but quickly recovering himself, he said:

"Does my royal brother Henry join this morning with the King in his game of tennis?"

"Does his Majesty do me the honor to select me as his partner?" inquired Henry, "or is it only a little attention on your part, my brother-in-law?"

"His Majesty has not so said, certainly," replied the duke, somewhat embarrassed; "but don't you generally play with him?"

Henry smiled, for so many and such serious events had occurred since he last played with the King that he would not have been astonished to learn that the King had changed his habitual companions at the game.

"I shall go there," said Henry, with a smile.

"Come," cried the duke.

"Are you going away?" inquired Marguerite.

"Yes, sister!"

"Are you in great haste?"

"In great haste."

"Might I venture to detain you for a few minutes?"

Such a request was so unusual coming from Marguerite that her brother looked at her while her color came and went.

"What can she be going to say to him?" thought Henry, no less surprised than the duke himself.

Marguerite, as if she had guessed her husband's thought, turned toward him.

"Sire," said she, with a charming smile, "you may go back to his majesty if it seem good to you, for the secret which I am going to reveal to my brother is already known to you, for the reason that the request which I made you yesterday in regard to this secret was as good as refused by your majesty. I should not wish, therefore," continued Marguerite, "to weary your majesty a second time by expressing in your presence a wish which seemed to be disagreeable."

"What do you mean?" asked François, looking at both of them with astonishment.

"Aha!" exclaimed Henry, flushing, with indignation, "I know what you mean, madame. In truth, I regret that I am not free. But if I cannot offer Monsieur de la Mole such hospitality as would be equivalent to an assurance, I cannot do less than to recommend to my brother D'Alençon the person *in whom you feel such a lively interest.* Perhaps," he added, in order to give still more emphasis to the words italicized, "perhaps my brother will discover some way whereby you will be permitted to keep Monsieur de la Mole here near you — that would be better than anything else, would it not, madame?"

"Come, come!" said Marguerite to herself, "the two together will do what neither of them would do individually."

And she opened the closet door and invited the wounded young man to come forth, saying to Henry as she did so:

"Your majesty must now explain to my brother why we are interested in Monsieur de la Mole."

Henry, caught in the snare, briefly related to M. d'Alençon, half a Protestant for the sake of opposition, as he himself was partly a Catholic from prudence, the arrival of Monsieur de la Mole at Paris, and how the young man had been severely wounded while bringing to him a letter from M. d'Auriac.

When the duke turned round, La Mole had come out from the closet and was standing before him.

François, at the sight of him, so handsome, so pale, and consequently doubly captivating by reason of his good looks and his pallor, felt a new sense of distrust spring up in the

depths of his soul. Marguerite held him both through jealousy and through pride.

"Brother," said Marguerite, "I will engage that this young gentleman will be useful to whoever may employ him. Should you accept his services, he will obtain a powerful protector, and you, a devoted servitor. In such times as the present, brother," continued she, "we cannot be too well surrounded by devoted friends; more especially," added she, lowering her voice so as to be heard by no one but the duke, "when one is ambitious, and has the misfortune to be only third in the succession to the throne."

Then she put her finger on her lip, to intimate to François that in spite of the initiation she still kept secret an important part of her idea.

"Perhaps," she added, "you may differ from Henry, in considering it not befitting that this young gentleman should remain so immediately in the vicinity of my apartments."

"Sister," replied François, eagerly, "if it meet your wishes, Monsieur de la Mole shall, in half an hour, be installed in my quarters, where, I think, he can have no cause to fear any danger. Let him love me and I will love him."

François was untruthful, for already in the very depths of his heart he detested La Mole.

"Well, well! So then I was not mistaken," said Marguerite to herself, seeing the King of Navarre's scowling face. "Ah, I see that to lead you two, one must lead the other."

Then finishing her thought:

"There! 'then you are doing well, Marguerite,' Henriette would say."

In fact, half an hour later La Mole, having been solemnly catechised by Marguerite, kissed the hem of her gown and with an agility remarkable in a wounded man was mounting the stairs that led to the Duc d'Alençon's quarters.

Two or three days passed, during which the excellent understanding between Henry and his wife seemed to grow more and more firmly established.

Henry had obtained permission not to make a public renunciation of his religion; but he had formally recanted in the presence of the king's confessor, and every morning he listened to the mass performed at the Louvre. At night he made a show of going to his wife's rooms, entered by the principal

door, talked a few minutes with her, and then took his departure by the small secret door, and went up to Madame de Sauve, who had duly informed him of the queen mother's visit as well as the unquestionable danger which threatened him. Warned on both sides, Henry redoubled his watchfulness against the queen mother and felt all distrust of her because little by little her face began to unbend, and one morning Henry detected a friendly smile on her bloodless lips. That day he had the greatest difficulty to bring himself to eat anything else than eggs cooked by himself or to drink anything else than water which his own eyes had seen dipped up from the Seine.

The massacres were still going on, but nevertheless were diminishing in violence. There had been such a wholesale butchery of the Huguenots that their number was greatly reduced. The larger part were dead; many had fled; a few had remained in concealment. Occasionally a great outcry arose in one district or another; it meant that one of these was discovered. Then the execution was either private or public according as the victim was driven into a corner or could escape. In such circumstances it furnished great amusement for the neighborhood where the affair took place; for instead of growing calmer as their enemies were annihilated, the Catholics grew more and more ferocious; the fewer the remaining victims, the more bloodthirsty they seemed in their persecution of the rest.

Charles IX. had taken great pleasure in hunting the Huguenots, and when he could no longer continue the chase himself he took delight in the noise of others hunting them.

One day, returning from playing at mall, which with tennis and hunting were his favorite amusements, he went to his mother's apartments in high spirits, followed by his usual train of courtiers.

"Mother," he said, embracing the Florentine, who, observing his joy, was already trying to detect its cause; "mother, good news! *Mort de tous les diables!* Do you know that the admiral's illustrious carcass which it was said was lost has been found?"

"Aha!" said Catharine.

"Oh, heavens! yes. You thought as I did, mother, the dogs had eaten a wedding dinner off him, but it was not so. My people, my dear people, my good people, had a clever idea and have hung the admiral up at the gibbet of Montfaucon.

"Du haut en bas Gaspard on a jété,
Et puis de bas en haut on l'a monté."[1]

"Well!" said Catharine.

"Well, good mother," replied Charles IX., "I have a strong desire to see him again, dear old man, now I know he is really dead. It is very fine weather and everything seems to be blooming to-day. The air is full of life and perfume, and I feel better than I ever did. If you like, mother, we will get on horseback and go to Montfaucon."

"Willingly, my son," said Catharine, "if I had not made an appointment which I cannot defer; and beside, to pay a visit to a man of such importance as the admiral, we should invite the whole court. It will be an occasion for observers to make curious observations. We shall see who comes and who stays away."

"Faith, you are right, mother, we will put it off till to-morrow; that will be better, so send out your invitations and I will send mine; or rather let us not invite any one. We will only say we are going, and then every one will be free. Good-by, mother! I am going to play on the horn."

"You will exhaust yourself, Charles, as Ambroise Paré is always telling you, and he is right. It is too severe an exercise for you."

"Bah! bah! bah!" said Charles; "I wish I were sure nothing else would be the cause of my death. I should then bury every one here, including Harry, who will one day succeed us all, as Nostradamus prophesies."

Catharine frowned.

"My son," she said, "mistrust especially all things that appear impossible, and meanwhile take care of yourself."

"Only two or three blasts to rejoice my dogs, poor things; they are wearied to death with doing nothing. I ought to have let them loose on the Huguenots; that would have done them good!"

And Charles IX. left his mother's room, went into his armory, took down a horn, and played on it with a vigor that would have done honor to Roland himself. It was difficult to understand how so weak a frame and such pale lips could blow a blast so powerful.

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[1] From up above to down below Gaspard was flung,
And then from down below to high above was hung.

Catharine, in truth, was awaiting some one as she had told her son. A moment after he had left her, one of her women came and spoke to her in a low voice. The queen smiled, rose, and saluting the persons who formed her court, followed the messenger.

Réné the Florentine, the man to whom on the eve of Saint Bartholomew the King of Navarre had given such a diplomatic reception, had just entered her oratory.

"Ah, here you are, Réné," said Catharine, "I was impatiently waiting for you."

Réné bowed.

"Did you receive the note I wrote you yesterday?"

"I had that honor."

"Did you make another trial, as I asked you to do, of the horoscope cast by Ruggieri, and agreeing so well with the prophecy of Nostradamus, which says that all my three sons shall reign? For several days past, affairs have decidedly changed, Réné, and it has occurred to me that possibly fate has become less threatening."

"Madame," replied Réné, shaking his head, "your majesty knows well that affairs do not change fate; on the contrary, fate controls affairs."

"Still, you have tried the sacrifice again, have you not?"

"Yes, madame," replied Réné; "for it is my duty to obey you in all things."

"Well — and the result?"

"Still the same, madame."

"What, the black lamb uttered its three cries?"

"Just the same as before, madame."

"The sign of three cruel deaths in my family," murmured Catharine.

"Alas!" said Réné.

"What then?"

"Then, madame, there was in its entrails that strange displacement of the liver which we had already observed in the first two — it was wrong side up!"

"A change of dynasty! Still — still — still the same!" muttered Catharine; "yet we must fight against this, Réné," she added.

Réné shook his head.

"I have told your majesty," he said, "that fate rules."

"Is that your opinion?" asked Catharine.

"Yes, madame."

"Do you remember Jeanne d'Albret's horoscope?"

"Yes, madame."

"Repeat it to me, I have quite forgotten it."

"*Vives honorata*," said Réné, "*morieris reformidata, regina amplificabere.*"

"That means, I believe," said Catharine, "*Thou shalt live honored* — and she lacked common necessaries, poor thing! *Thou shalt die feared* — and we laughed at her. *Thou shalt be greater than thou hast been as a queen* — and she is dead, and sleeps in a tomb on which we have not even engraved her name."

"Madame, your majesty does not translate the *vives honorata* rightly. The Queen of Navarre lived honored; for all her life she enjoyed the love of her children, the respect of her partisans; respect and love all the more sincere in that she was poor."

"Yes," said Catharine, "I grant you the *vives honorata;* but *morieris reformidata:* how will you explain that?"

"Nothing more easy: *Thou shalt die feared.*"

"Well — did she die feared?"

"So much so that she would not have died had not your majesty feared her. Then — *As a queen thou shalt be greater;* or, *Thou shalt be greater than thou hast been as a queen.* This is equally true, madame; for in exchange for a terrestrial crown she has doubtless, as a queen and martyr, a celestial crown; and, besides, who knows what the future may reserve for her posterity?"

Catharine was excessively superstitious; she was even more alarmed at Réné's coolness than at the steadfastness of the auguries, and as in her case any scrape was a chance for her boldly to master the situation, she said suddenly to him, without any other transition than the working of her own thoughts:

"Are any perfumes come from Italy?"

"Yes, madame."

"Send me a boxful."

"Of which?"

"Of the last, of those" —

Catharine stopped.

"Of those the Queen of Navarre was so fond of?" asked Réné.

"Exactly."

"I need not prepare them, for your majesty is now as skilful at them as I am."

"You think so?" said Catharine. "They certainly succeed."

"Has your majesty anything more to say to me?" asked the perfumer.

"Nothing," replied Catharine, thoughtfully; "at least I think not, only if there is any change in the sacrifices, let me know it in time. By the way, let us leave the lambs, and try the hens."

"Alas, madame, I fear that in changing the victim we shall not change the presages."

"Do as I tell you."

The perfumer bowed and left the apartment.

Catharine mused for a short time, then rose and returning to her bedchamber, where her women awaited her, announced the pilgrimage to Montfaucon for the morrow.

The news of this pleasure party caused great excitement in the palace and great confusion in the city: the ladies prepared their most elegant toilets; the gentlemen, their finest arms and steeds; the tradesmen closed their shops, and the populace killed a few straggling Huguenots, in order to furnish company for the dead admiral.

There was a tremendous hubbub all the evening and during a good part of the night.

La Mole had spent a miserable day, and this miserable day had followed three or four others equally miserable. Monsieur d'Alençon, to please his sister, had installed him in his apartments, but had not seen him since. He felt himself like a poor deserted child, deprived of the tender care, the soothing attention of two women, the recollection of one of whom occupied him perpetually. He had heard of her through the surgeon Ambroise Paré, whom she had sent to him, but what he heard from a man of fifty who was ignorant or pretended to be ignorant of the interest felt by La Mole in everything appertaining to Marguerite was very fragmentary and insufficient. Gillonne, indeed, had come once, of her own accord, be it understood, to ask after him, and the visit was to him like a sunbeam darting into a dungeon, and La Mole had remained dazzled by it, and had expected a second visit, and yet two days passed and she had not appeared.

As soon, therefore, as the convalescent heard of this magnificent reunion of the whole court for the following day he sent to ask Monsieur d'Alençon the favor of accompanying it.

The duke did not even inquire whether La Mole was able to bear the fatigue, but merely answered:

"Capital! Let him have one of my horses."

That was all La Mole wanted. Maître Ambroise Paré came as usual to dress his wounds, and La Mole explained to him the necessity he was under of mounting on horseback, and begged him to put on the bandages with double care.

The two wounds, both that on the breast and that on the shoulder, were closed; the one on the shoulder only pained him. Both were rose-red in color, which showed that they were in a fair way of healing. Maître Ambroise Paré covered them with gummed taffetas, a remedy greatly in vogue then, and promised La Mole that if he did not exert himself too much everything would go well.

La Mole was at the height of joy. Save for a certain weakness caused by loss of blood and a slight giddiness attributable to the same cause, he felt as well as could be. Besides, doubtless Marguerite would be in the party; he should see Marguerite again. And when he remembered what benefit he had received from the sight of Gillonne, he had no doubt that her mistress would have a still more efficacious influence upon him.

So La Mole spent a part of the money which he had received when he went away from his family in the purchase of the most beautiful white satin doublet and the finest embroidered mantle that could be furnished by a fashionable tailor. The same tailor procured for him a pair of those perfumed boots such as were worn at that period. The whole outfit was brought to him in the morning only a half hour later than the time at which La Mole had ordered it, so that he had not much fault to find.

He dressed himself quickly, looked in the glass, and found that he was suitably attired, arranged, and perfumed. Then by walking up and down the room several times, he assured himself that though it caused him some sharp pangs, still the happiness which he felt in his heart would render these physical inconveniences of no account. A cherry-colored mantle of his own design, and cut rather longer than they were worn then, proved to be very becoming to him.

While he was thus engaged in the Louvre, another scene, of a similar kind, was going on at the Hôtel de Guise. A tall gentleman, with red hair, was examining, before a glass, a reddish mark which went across his face very disagreeably; he combed and perfumed his mustache, and while he was perfuming it, he kept spreading over that unfortunate mark which, in spite of all the cosmetics then in use, persisted in reappearing, a three-fold layer of white and red; but as the application was insufficient an idea came to him: a hot sun, an August sun, was flashing its rays into the court-yard; he made his way down there, took his hat in his hand, and with his nose in the air and his eyes closed, he walked up and down for ten minutes, fully exposed to the devouring flame which fell from heaven like a torrent. At the end of these ten minutes, owing to the unexampled ardor of the sun, the gentleman's face had acquired such a brilliant color that the red streak was now no more in harmony with the rest than it had been, but in comparison seemed yellow.

Nevertheless, the gentleman did not seem much dissatisfied with this rainbow effect which he did his best to bring into accord with the rest of his face by spreading a layer of vermilion over it, after which he put on a magnificent suit which a tailor had brought to his room without any commands from him. Thus attired, scented, and armed from head to foot, he again went down into the court-yard and began to pat a large black horse whose beauty would have been matchless but for a small cut, like his own, made by a reiter's sabre in one of the last civil conflicts.

Yet, enchanted with the good steed as he was with himself, the gentleman, whom no doubt our readers have easily recognized, was on his back a quarter of an hour before any of the others and making the court-yard of the Hôtel de Guise resound with the whinnying of the charger accompanied by exclamations of *mordi*, pronounced in every variety of accent according as he compelled the horse to submit to this authority. At the end of a moment the horse completely subdued, recognized by his obedience and subjection his master's legitimate control, but the victory had not been obtained without noise, and this noise, which was perhaps the very thing our gentleman reckoned upon, this noise had attracted to the windows a lady whom our queller of horses saluted respectfully, and who smiled at him in the most agreeable manner.

Five minutes later Madame de Nevers summoned her steward.

"Sir," said she, "has Monsieur le Comte Annibal de Coconnas been furnished a suitable breakfast?"

"Yes, madame," replied the steward, "he ate this morning with a better appetite than usual."

"Very well, sir," said the duchess.

Then addressing her first gentleman in waiting:

"Monsieur d'Arguzon," she said, "let us set out for the Louvre, and keep an eye, I beg, on Monsieur le Comte Annibal de Coconnas, for he is wounded, and consequently still weak; and I would not for all the world any accident should happen to him. That would make the Huguenots laugh, for they owe him a spite since the blessed night of Saint Bartholomew."

And Madame de Nevers, mounting her horse, went joyfully towards the Louvre, which was the general rendezvous.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon as a file of cavaliers, overflowing with gold, jewels, and magnificent garments, appeared in the Rue Saint Denis, entering by the corner of the Cemetery of the Innocents and stretching itself out in the sunlight between the two rows of gloomy looking houses like an immense reptile with variegated rings.

CHAPTER XVI.

A DEAD ENEMY'S BODY ALWAYS SMELLS SWEET.

No brilliant company, however, could give any idea of this spectacle. The rich and elegant silk dresses, bequeathed as a magnificent fashion by François I. to his successors, had not yet been changed into those formal and sombre vestments which came into fashion under Henry III.; so that the costume of Charles IX., less rich, but perhaps more elegant than those of preceding reigns, displayed its perfect harmony. In our day no similar cortège could have any standard of comparison, for when we wish magnificence of display we are reduced to mere symmetry and uniform.

Pages, esquires, gentlemen of low degree, dogs and horses, following on the flanks and in the rear, formed of the royal cor-

tège an absolute army. Behind this army came the populace, or rather the populace was everywhere.

It followed, trooped alongside, and rushed ahead; there were shouts of *Noel* and *Haro*, for there were distinguishable in the procession many Calvinists to hoot at, and the populace harbors resentment.

That morning Charles, in presence of Catharine and the Duc de Guise, had, as a perfectly natural thing spoken before Henry of Navarre of going to visit the gibbet of Montfaucon, or, rather, the admiral's mutilated corpse which had been suspended from it. Henry's first impulse had been to refuse to take part in this excursion. Catharine supposed he would. At the first words in which he expressed his repugnance she exchanged a glance and a smile with the Duc de Guise. Henry detected them both, understood what they meant, and suddenly recovering his presence of mind said:

"But why should I not go? I am a Catholic, and am bound to my new religion."

Then addressing the King:

"Your Majesty may reckon on my company," he said; "and I shall be always happy to accompany you wheresoever you may go."

And he threw a sweeping glance around, to see whose brows might be frowning.

Perhaps of all that cortège, the person who was looked at with the greatest curiosity was that motherless son, that kingless king, that Huguenot turned Catholic. His long and marked countenance, his somewhat vulgar figure, his familiarity with his inferiors, which he carried to a degree almost derogatory to a king, — a familiarity acquired by the mountaineer habits of his youth, and which he preserved till his death, — marked him out to the spectators, some of whom cried:

"To mass, Harry, to mass!"

To which Henry replied:

"I attended it yesterday, to-day, and I shall attend it again to-morrow. *Ventre saint gris!* surely that is sufficient."

Marguerite was on horseback — so lovely, so fresh, so elegant that admiration made a regular concert around her, though it must be confessed that a few notes of it were addressed to her companion, the Duchesse de Nevers, who had just joined her on a white horse so proud of his burden that he kept tossing his head.

"Well, duchess!" said the Queen of Navarre, "what is there new?"

"Why, madame," replied the duchess, aloud, "I know of nothing."

Then in a lower tone:

"And what has become of the Huguenot?"

"I have found him a retreat almost safe," replied Marguerite. "And the wholesale assassin, what have you done with him?"

"He wished to take part in the festivity, and so we mounted him on Monsieur de Nevers' war-horse, a creature as big as an elephant. He is a fearful cavalier. I allowed him to be present at the ceremony to-day, as I felt that your Huguenot would be prudent enough to keep his chamber and that there was no fear of their meeting."

"Oh, faith!" replied Marguerite, smiling, "if he were here, and he is not here, I do not think a collision would take place. My Huguenot is remarkably handsome, but nothing more — a dove, and not a hawk; he coos, but does not bite. After all," she added, with a gesture impossible to describe, and shrugging her shoulders slightly, "after all, perhaps our King thought him a Huguenot while he is only a Brahmin, and his religion forbids him to shed blood."

"But where, pray, is the Duc d'Alençon?" inquired Henriette; "I do not see him."

"He will join us later; his eyes troubled him this morning and he was inclined not to come, but as it is known that because he holds a different opinion from Charles and his brother Henry he inclines toward the Huguenots, he became convinced that the King might put a bad interpretation on his absence and he changed his mind. There, hark! people are gazing and shouting yonder; it must be that he is coming by the Porte Montmartre."

"You are right; 't is he; I recognize him. How elegant he looks to-day," said Henriette. "For some time he has taken particular pains with his appearance; he must be in love. See how nice it is to be a prince of the blood, he gallops over every one, they all draw on one side."

"Yes," said Marguerite, laughing, "he will ride over us. For Heaven's sake draw your attendants to one side, duchess, for there is one of them who will be killed if he does not give way."

"It is my hero!" cried the duchess; "look, only look!"

Coconnas had left his place to approach the Duchesse de Nevers, but just as his horse was crossing the kind of exterior boulevard which separates the street from the Faubourg Saint Denis, a cavalier of the Duc d'Alençon's suite, trying in vain to rein in his excited horse, dashed full against Coconnas. Coconnas, shaken by the collision, reeled on his colossal mount, his hat nearly fell off; he put it on more firmly and turned round furiously.

"Heavens!" said Marguerite, in a low tone, to her friend, "Monsieur de la Mole!"

"That handsome, pale young man?" exclaimed the duchess, unable to repress her first impression.

"Yes, yes; the very one who nearly upset your Piedmontese."

"Oh," said the duchess, "something terrible will happen! they look at each other — recollect each other!"

Coconnas had indeed recognized La Mole, and in his surprise dropped his bridle, for he believed he had killed his old companion, or at least put him *hors de combat* for some time. La Mole had also recognized Coconnas, and he felt a fire mount up into his face. For some seconds, which sufficed for the expression of all the sentiments these two men harbored, they gazed at each other in a way which made the two women shudder.

After which, La Mole, having looked about him, and doubtless seeing that the place was ill chosen for an explanation, spurred his horse and rejoined the Duc d'Alençon. Coconnas remained stationary for a moment, twisting his mustache until the point almost entered his eye; then seeing La Mole dash off without a word, he did the same.

"Ah, ha!" said Marguerite, with pain and contempt, "so I was not mistaken — it is really too much;" and she bit her lips till the blood came.

"He is very handsome," added the Duchesse de Nevers, with commiseration.

Just at this moment the Duc d'Alençon reached his place behind the King and the queen mother, so that his suite, in following him, were obliged to pass before Marguerite and the Duchesse de Nevers. La Mole, as he rode before the two princesses, raised his hat, saluted the queen, and, bowing to his horse's neck, remained uncovered until her majesty should honor him with a look.

But Marguerite turned her head aside disdainfully.

La Mole, no doubt, comprehended the contemptuous expression of the queen's features, and from pale he became livid, and that he might not fall from his horse was compelled to hold on by the mane.

"Oh, oh!" said Henriette to the queen; "look, cruel that you are! — he is going to faint."

"Good," said the queen, with a cruel smile; "that is the only thing we need. Where are your salts?"

Madame de Nevers was mistaken. La Mole, with an effort, recovered himself, and sitting erect on his horse took his place in the Duc d'Alençon's suite.

Meantime they kept on their way and at length saw the lugubrious outline of the gibbet, erected and first used by Enguerrand de Marigny. Never before had it been so adorned.

The ushers and guards went forward and made a wide circle around the enclosure. As they drew near, the crows perched on the gibbet flew away with croakings of despair.

The gibbet erected at Montfaucon generally offered behind its posts a shelter for the dogs that gathered there attracted by frequent prey, and for philosophic bandits who came to ponder on the sad chances of fortune.

That day at Montfaucon there were apparently neither dogs nor bandits. The ushers and guards had scared away the dogs together with the crows, and the bandits had mingled with the throng so as to make some of the lucky hits which are the more cheerful vicissitudes of their profession.

The procession moved forward; the King and Catharine arrived first, then came the Duc d'Anjou, Duc d'Alençon, the King of Navarre, Monsieur de Guise, and their followers, then Madame Marguerite, the Duchesse de Nevers, and all the women who composed what was called the queen's flying squadron; then the pages, squires, attendants, and people — in all ten thousand persons.

From the principal gibbet hung a misshapen mass, a black corpse stained with coagulated blood and mud, whitened by layers of dust. The carcass was headless, and it was hung by the legs, and the populace, ingenious as it always is, had replaced the head with a bunch of straw, to which was fastened a mask; and in the mouth of this mask some wag, knowing the admiral's habit, had introduced a toothpick.

At once appalling and singular was the spectacle of all these elegant lords and handsome ladies like a procession painted by Goya, riding along in the midst of those blackened carcasses and gibbets, with their long lean arms.

The noisier the exultation of the spectators, the more strikingly it contrasted with the melancholy silence and cold insensibility of those corpses — objects of ridicule which made even the jesters shudder.

Many could scarcely endure this horrible spectacle, and by his pallor might be distinguished, in the centre of collected Huguenots, Henry, who, great as was his power of self-control and the degree of dissimulation conferred on him by Heaven, could no longer bear it.

He made as his excuse the strong stench which emanated from all those human remains, and going to Charles, who, with Catharine, had stopped in front of the admiral's dead body, he said:

"Sire, does not your Majesty find that this poor carcass smells so strong that it is impossible to remain near it any longer?"

"Do you find it so, Harry?" inquired the King, his eyes sparkling with ferocious joy.

"Yes, sire."

"Well, then, I am not of your opinion; a dead enemy's corpse always smells sweet."

"Faith, sire," said Tavannes, "since your Majesty knew that we were going to make a little call on the admiral, you should have invited Pierre Ronsard, your teacher of poetry; he would have extemporized an epitaph for the old Gaspard."

"There is no need of him for that," said Charles IX., after an instant's thought:

"Ci-gît, — mais c'est mal entendu,
Pour lui le mot est trop honnête, —
Ici l'amiral est pendu
Par les pieds, à faute de tête." [1]

"Bravo! bravo!" cried the Catholic gentlemen in unison, while the collected Huguenots scowled and kept silent, and Henry, as he was talking with Marguerite and Madame de Nevers, pretended not to have heard.

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[1] Here lies — the term the question begs,
For him you need a word that 's stronger:
Here hangs the admiral by the legs —
Because he has a head no longer!

"Come, come, sir!" said Catharine, who, in spite of the perfumes with which she was covered, began to be made ill by the odor. "Come, however agreeable company may be, it must be left at last; let us therefore say good-by to the admiral, and return to Paris."

She nodded ironically as when one takes leave of a friend, and, taking the head of the column, turned to the road, while the cortège defiled before Coligny's corpse.

The sun was sinking in the horizon.

The throng followed fast on their majesties so as to enjoy to the very end all the splendors of the procession and the details of the spectacle; the thieves followed the populace, so that in ten minutes after the King's departure there was no person about the admiral's mutilated carcass on which now blew the first breezes of the evening.

When we say no person, we err. A gentleman mounted on a black horse, and who, doubtless, could not contemplate at his ease the black mutilated trunk when it was honored by the presence of princes, had remained behind, and was examining, in all their details, the bolts, stone pillars, chains, and in fact the gibbet, which no doubt appeared to him (but lately arrived in Paris, and ignorant of the perfection to which things could be brought in the capital) the paragon of all that man could invent in the way of awful ugliness.

We need hardly inform our friends that this man was M. Annibal de Coconnas.

A woman's practised eye had vainly looked for him in the cavalcade and had searched among the ranks without being able to find him.

Monsieur de Coconnas, as we have said, was standing ecstatically contemplating Enguerrand de Marigny's work.

But this woman was not the only person who was trying to find Monsieur de Coconnas. Another gentleman, noticeable for his white satin doublet and gallant plume, after looking toward the front and on all sides, bethought him to look back, and saw Coconnas's tall figure and the silhouette of his gigantic horse standing out strongly against the sky reddened by the last rays of the setting sun.

Then the gentleman in the white satin doublet turned out from the road taken by the majority of the company, struck into a narrow footpath, and describing a curve rode back toward the gibbet.

COCONNAS AT THE GIBBET.

Almost at the same time the lady whom we have recognized as the Duchesse de Nevers, just as we recognized the tall gentleman on the black horse as Coconnas, rode alongside of Marguerite and said to her:

"We were both mistaken, Marguerite, for the Piedmontese has remained behind and Monsieur de la Mole has gone back to meet him."

"By Heaven!" exclaimed Marguerite, laughing, "then something is going to happen. Faith, I confess I should not be sorry to revise my opinion about him."

Marguerite then turned her horse and witnessed the manœuvre which we have described La Mole as performing.

The two princesses left the procession; the opportunity was most favorable: they were passing by a hedge-lined footpath which led up the hill, and in doing so passed within thirty yards of the gibbet. Madame de Nevers whispered a word in her captain's ear, Marguerite beckoned to Gillonne, and the four turned into this cross path and went and hid behind the shrubbery nearest to the place where the scene which they evidently expected to witness was to take place. It was about thirty yards, as we have already said, from the spot where Coconnas in a state of ecstasy was gesticulating before the admiral.

Marguerite dismounted, Madame de Nevers and Gillonne did the same; the captain then got down and took the bridles of the four horses. Thick green furnished the three women a seat such as princesses often seek in vain. The glade before them was so open that they would not miss the slightest detail.

La Mole had accomplished his circuit. He rode up slowly and took his stand behind Coconnas; then stretching out his hand tapped him on the shoulder.

The Piedmontese turned round.

"Oh!" said he, "so it was not a dream! You are still alive!"

"Yes, sir," replied La Mole; "yes, I am still alive. It is no fault of yours, but I am still alive."

"By Heaven! I know you again well enough," replied Coconnas, "in spite of your pale face. You were redder than that the last time we met!"

"And I," said La Mole, "I also recognize you, in spite of that yellow line across your face. You were paler than that when I made that mark for you!"

Coconnas bit his lips, but, evidently resolved on continuing the conversation in a tone of irony, he said:

"It is curious, is it not, Monsieur de la Mole, particularly for a Huguenot, to be able to look at the admiral suspended from that iron hook? And yet they say there are people extravagant enough to accuse us of killing even small Huguenots, sucklings."

"Count," said La Mole, bowing, "I am no longer a Huguenot; I have the happiness of being a Catholic!"

"Bah!" exclaimed Coconnas, bursting into loud laughter; "so you are a convert, sir? Oh, that was clever of you!"

"Sir," replied La Mole, with the same seriousness and the same politeness, "I made a vow to become a convert if I escaped the massacre."

"Count," said the Piedmontese, "that was a very prudent vow, and I beg to congratulate you. Perhaps you made still others?"

"Yes, I made a second," answered La Mole, patting his horse with entire coolness.

"And what might that be?" inquired Coconnas.

"To hang you up there, by that small nail which seems to await you beneath Monsieur de Coligny."

"What, as I am now?" asked Coconnas, "alive and merry?"

"No, sir; after I have passed my sword through your body!"

Coconnas became purple, and his eyes darted flames.

"Do you mean," said he in a bantering tone, "to that nail?"

"Yes," replied La Mole, "to that nail."

"You are not tall enough to do it, my little sir!"

"Then I 'll get on your horse, my great man-slayer," replied La Mole. "Ah, you believe, my dear Monsieur Annibal de Coconnas, that one may with impunity assassinate people under the loyal and honorable excuse of being a hundred to one, forsooth! But the day comes when a man finds his man; and I believe that day has come now. I should very well like to send a bullet through your ugly head; but, bah! I might miss you, for my hand is still trembling from the traitorous wounds you inflicted upon me."

"My ugly head!" shouted Coconnas, leaping down from his steed. "Down — down from your horse, M. le Comte, and draw!"

And he drew his sword.

"I believe your Huguenot called Monsieur de Coconnas an 'ugly head,'" whispered the Duchesse de Nevers. "Do you think he is bad looking?"

"He is charming," said Marguerite, laughing, "and I am compelled to acknowledge that fury renders Monsieur de La Mole unjust; but hush! let us watch!"

In fact, La Mole had dismounted from his horse with as much deliberation as Coconnas had shown of precipitation; he had taken off his cherry-colored cloak, laid it leisurely on the ground, drawn his sword, and put himself on guard.

"Aïe!" he exclaimed, as he stretched out his arm.

"Ouf!" muttered Coconnas, as he moved his,—for both, as it will be remembered, had been wounded in the shoulder and it hurt them when they made any violent movement.

A burst of laughter, ill repressed, came from the clump of bushes. The princesses could not quite contain themselves at the sight of their two champions rubbing their omoplates and making up faces.

This burst of merriment reached the ears of the two gentlemen, who were ignorant that they had witnesses; turning round, they beheld their ladies.

La Mole resumed his guard as firm as an automaton, and Coconnas crossed his blade with an emphatic "By Heaven!"

"Ah ça! now they will murder each other in real earnest, if we do not interfere. There has been enough of this. Holá, gentlemen!—holá!" cried Marguerite.

"Let them be! let them be!" said Henriette, who having seen Coconnas at work, hoped in her heart that he would have as easy a victory over La Mole as he had over Mercandon's son and two nephews.

"Oh, they are really beautiful so!" exclaimed Marguerite. "Look—they seem to breathe fire!"

Indeed, the combat, begun with sarcasms and mutual insults, became silent as soon as the champions had crossed their swords. Each distrusted his own strength, and each, at every quick pass, was compelled to restrain an expression of pain occasioned by his own wounds. Nevertheless, with eyes fixed and burning, mouth half open, and teeth clenched, La Mole advanced with short and firm steps toward his adversary, who, seeing in him a most skilful swordsman, retreated step by step. They both thus reached the edge of the ditch on the

other side of which were the spectators; then, as if his retreat had been only a simple stratagem to draw nearer to his lady, Coconnas took his stand, and as La Mole made his guard a little too wide, he made a thrust with the quickness of lightning and instantly La Mole's white satin doublet was stained with a spot of blood which kept growing larger.

"Courage!" cried the Duchesse de Nevers.

"Ah, poor La Mole!" exclaimed Marguerite, with a cry of distress.

La Mole heard this cry, darted at the queen one of those looks which penetrate the heart even deeper than a sword-point, and taking advantage of a false parade, thrust vigorously at his adversary.

This time the two women uttered two cries which seemed like one. The point of La Mole's rapier had appeared, all covered with blood, behind Coconnas's back.

Yet neither fell. Both remained erect, looking at each other with open mouth, and feeling that on the slightest movement they must lose their balance. At last the Piedmontese, more dangerously wounded than his adversary, and feeling his senses forsaking him with his blood, fell on La Mole, grasping him with one hand, while with the other he endeavored to unsheath his poniard.

La Mole roused all his strength, raised his hand, and let fall the pommel of his sword on Coconnas's forehead. Coconnas, stupefied by the blow, fell, but in his fall drew down his adversary with him, and both rolled into the ditch.

Then Marguerite and the Duchesse de Nevers, seeing that, dying as they were, they were still struggling to destroy each other, hastened to them, followed by the captain of the guards; but before they could reach them the combatants' hands unloosened, their eyes closed, and letting go their grasp of their weapons they stiffened in what seemed like their final agony. A wide stream of blood bubbled round them.

"Oh, brave, brave La Mole!" cried Marguerite, unable any longer to repress her admiration. "Ah! pardon me a thousand times for having a moment doubted your courage."

And her eyes filled with tears.

"Alas! alas!" murmured the duchess, "gallant Annibal. Did you ever see two such intrepid lions, madame?"

And she sobbed aloud.

"Heavens! what ugly thrusts," said the captain, endeavoring

to stanch the streams of blood. "Holá! you, there, come here as quickly as you can — here, I say"—

He addressed a man who, seated on a kind of tumbril or cart painted red, appeared in the evening mist singing this old song, which had doubtless been suggested to him by the miracle of the Cemetery of the Innocents:

"Bel aubespin fleurissant
Verdissant,
Le long de ce beau rivage,
Tu es vétu, jusqu'au bas
Des longs bras
D'une lambrusche sauvage.

"Le chantre rossignolet,
Nouvelet,
Courtisant sa bien-aimée
Pour ses amours alléger
Vient loger
Tous les ans sous ta ramée.

"Or, vis, gentil aubespin
Vis sans fin;
Vis, sans que jamais tonnerre,
Ou la cognée, ou les vents
Ou le temps
Te puissent ruer par." . . .[1]

"Holá! hé!" shouted the captain a second time, "come when you are called. Don't you see that these gentlemen need help?"

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[1] Hawthorn brightly blossoming,
Thou dost fling
Verdant shadows down the river;
Thou art clad from top to roots
With long shoots
On which graceful leaflets quiver.

Here the poetic nightingale
Ne'er doth fail —
Having sung his love to capture —
To repair to consecrate,
'Neath thy verdure, hours of rapture.

Therefore live, O Hawthorn fair,
Live fore'er!
May no thunder bolt dare smite thee!
May no axe or cruel blast
Overcast!
May the tooth of time . . .

The carter, whose repulsive exterior and coarse face formed a singular contrast with the sweet and sylvan song we have just quoted, stopped his horse, got out, and bending over the two bodies said:

"These be terrible wounds, sure enough, but I have made worse in my time."

"Who are you, pray?" inquired Marguerite, experiencing, in spite of herself, a certain vague terror which she could not overcome.

"Madame," replied the man, bowing down to the ground, "I am Maître Caboche, headsman to the provostry of Paris, and I have come to hang up at the gibbet some companions for Monsieur the Admiral."

"Well! and I am the Queen of Navarre," replied Marguerite; "cast your corpses down there, spread in your cart the housings of our horses, and bring these two gentlemen softly behind us to the Louvre."

CHAPTER XVII.

MAÎTRE AMBROISE PARÉ'S CONFRÈRE.

The tumbril in which Coconnas and La Mole were laid started back toward Paris, following in the shadow the guiding group. It stopped at the Louvre, and the driver was amply rewarded. The wounded men were carried to the Duc d'Alençon's quarters, and Maître Ambroise Paré was sent for.

When he arrived, neither of the two men had recovered consciousness.

La Mole was the least hurt of the two. The sword had struck him below the right armpit, but without touching any vital parts. Coconnas was run through the lungs, and the air that escaped from his wound made the flame of a candle waver.

Ambroise Paré would not answer for Coconnas.

Madame de Nevers was in despair. Relying on Coconnas's strength, courage, and skill, she had prevented Marguerite from interfering with the duel. She would have had Coconnas taken to the Hôtel de Guise and gladly bestowed on him a second time the care which she had already lavished on his comfort, but her husband was likely to arrive from Rome at any

moment and find fault with the introduction of a strange man in the domestic establishment.

To hide the cause of the wounds, Marguerite had had the two young men brought to her brother's rooms, where one of them, to be sure, had already been installed, by saying that they were two gentlemen who had been thrown from their horses during the excursion, but the truth was divulged by the captain, who, having witnessed the duel, could not help expressing his admiration, and it was soon known at court that two new *raffinés*[1] had burst into sudden fame. Attended by the same surgeon, who divided his attentions between them, the two wounded men passed through the different phases of convalescence arising from the greater or less severity of their wounds. La Mole, who was less severely wounded of the two, was the first to recover consciousness. A terrible fever had taken possession of Coconnas and his return to life was attended by all the symptoms of the most horrible delirium.

Though La Mole was confined in the same room with Coconnas, he had not, when he came to himself, seen his companion, or if he saw him, he betrayed no sign that he saw him. Coconnas, on the contrary, as soon as he opened his eyes, fastened them on La Mole with an expression which proved that the blood he had lost had not modified the passions of his fiery temperament.

Coconnas thought he was dreaming, and that in this dream he saw the enemy he imagined he had twice slain, only the dream was unduly prolonged. After having observed La Mole laid, like himself, on a couch, and his wounds dressed by the surgeon, he saw him rise up in bed, while he himself was still confined to his by his fever, his weakness, and his pain; he saw him get out of bed, then walk, first leaning on the surgeon's arm, and then on a cane, and finally without assistance.

Coconnas, still delirious, viewed these different stages of his companion's recovery with eyes sometimes dull, at others wandering, but always threatening.

All this presented to the Piedmontese's fiery spirit a fearful mixture of the fantastic and the real. For him La Mole was dead, wholly dead, having been actually killed twice and not merely once, and yet he recognized this same La Mole's ghost lying in a bed like his own; then, as we have said, he saw this

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[1] *Raffinés* or *raffiné d'honneur* was a term applied in the 16th century to men sensitively punctilious and ready to draw their swords at the slightest provocation.—N.H.D.

ghost get up, walk round, and, horrible to relate, come toward his bed. This ghost, whom Coconnas would have wished to avoid, even had it been in the depths of hell, came straight to him and stopped beside his pillow, standing there and looking at him; there was in his features a look of gentleness and compassion which Coconnas took for the expression of hellish derision.

There arose in his mind, possibly more wounded than his body, an insatiable thirst of vengeance. He was wholly occupied with one idea, that of procuring some weapon, and with that weapon piercing the body or the ghost of La Mole which so cruelly persecuted him. His clothes, stained with blood, had been placed on a chair by his bed, but afterwards removed, it being thought imprudent to leave them in his sight; but his poniard still remained on the chair, for it was imagined it would be some time before he would want to use it.

Coconnas saw the poniard; three nights while La Mole was slumbering he strove to reach it; three nights his strength failed him, and he fainted. At length, on the fourth night, he clutched it convulsively, and groaning with the pain of the effort, hid the weapon beneath his pillow.

The next day he saw something he had never deemed possible. La Mole's ghost, which every day seemed to gain strength, while he, occupied with the terrible dream, kept losing his in the eternal weaving of the scheme which was to rid him of it, — La Mole's ghost, growing more and more energetic, walked thoughtfully up and down the room three or four times, then, after having put on his mantle, buckled on his sword, and put on a broad-brimmed felt hat, opened the door and went out.

Coconnas breathed again. He thought that he was freed from his phantom. For two or three hours his blood circulated more calmly and coolly in his veins than it had done since the duel. La Mole's absence for one day would have restored Coconnas to his senses; a week's absence would perhaps have cured him; unfortunately, La Mole returned at the end of two hours.

This reappearance of La Mole was like a poniard-stab for Coconnas; and although La Mole did not return alone, Coconnas did not give a single look at his companion.

And yet his companion was worth looking at.

He was a man of forty, short, thick-set, and vigorous, with black hair which came to his eyebrows, and a black beard,

which, contrary to the fashion of the period, thickly covered the chin; but he seemed one who cared little for the fashion.

He wore a leather jerkin, all covered with brown spots; red hose and leggings, thick shoes coming above the ankle, a cap the same color as his stockings, and a girdle, from which hung a large knife in a leather sheaf, completed his attire.

This singular personage, whose presence in the Louvre seemed so anomalous, threw his brown mantle on a chair and unceremoniously approached Coconnas, whose eyes, as if fascinated, remained fixed upon La Mole, who remained at some distance. He looked at the sick man, and shaking his head, said to La Mole:

"You have waited till it was rather late, my dear gentleman."

"I could not get out sooner," said La Mole.

"Eh! Heavens! you should have sent for me."

"Whom had I to send?"

"True, I forgot where we are. I had told those ladies, but they would not listen to me. If my prescriptions had been followed instead of those of that ass, Ambroise Paré, you would by this time have been in a condition to go in pursuit of adventures together, or exchange another sword-thrust if such had been your good pleasure; but we shall see. Does your friend listen to reason?"

"Scarcely."

"Hold out your tongue, my dear gentleman."

Coconnas thrust out his tongue to La Mole, making such a hideous grimace that the practitioner shook his head a second time.

"Oho!" he muttered, "contraction of the muscles. There 's no time to be lost. This evening I will send you a potion ready prepared; you must make him take it three times: once at midnight, once at one o'clock, and once at two."

"Very well."

"But who will make him take it?"

"I will."

"You?"

"Yes."

"You give me your word?"

"On my honor."

"And if any physician should attempt to abstract the slightest portion to analyze it and discover what its ingredients are" —

"I will spill it to the last drop."

"This also on your honor?"

"I swear it!"

"Whom shall I send you this potion by?"

"Any one you please."

"But my messenger"—

"Well?"

"How will he get to you?"

"That is easily managed. He will say that he comes from Monsieur Réné, the perfumer."

"That Florentine who lives on the Pont Saint Michel?"

"Exactly. He is allowed to enter the Louvre at any hour, day or night."

The man smiled.

"In fact," said he, "the queen mother at least owes him that much. It is understood, then; he will come from Maître Réné, the perfumer. I may surely use his name for once: he has often enough practised my profession without having taken his degree either."

"Then," said La Mole, "I may rely on you."

"You may."

"And about the payment?"

"Oh, we will arrange about that with the gentleman himself when he is well again."

"You may be quite easy on that score, for I am sure he will pay you generously."

"I believe you. And yet," he added with a strange smile, "as the people with whom I have to do are not wont to be grateful, I should not be surprised if when he is on his legs again he should forget or at least not think to give a single thought to me."

"All right," said La Mole, smiling also, "in that case I should have to jog his memory."

"Very well, we 'll leave it so. In two hours you will receive the medicine."

"Au revoir!"

"You said"—

"Au revoir."

The man smiled.

"It is always my custom," he added, "to say adieu! So adieu, Monsieur de la Mole. In two hours you will have the

potion. You understand, it must be given at midnight — in three doses — at intervals of an hour."

So saying he took his departure, and La Mole was left alone with Coconnas.

Coconnas had heard the whole conversation, but understood nothing of it; a senseless babble of words, a senseless jangling of phrases, was all that came to him. Of the whole interview he remembered nothing except the word "midnight."

He continued to watch La Mole, who remained in the room, pacing thoughtfully up and down.

The unknown doctor kept his word, and at the appointed time sent the medicine, which La Mole placed on a small silver chafing-dish, and having taken this precaution, went to bed.

This action on the part of La Mole gave Coconnas a little quietude. He tried to shut his eyes, but his feverish slumbers were only a continuation of his waking delirium. The same phantom which haunted him by day came to disturb him by night; across his hot eyelids he still saw La Mole as threatening as ever, and a voice kept repeating in his ear: "Midnight, midnight, midnight!"

Suddenly the echoing note of a clock's bell awoke in the night and struck twelve. Coconnas opened his blood-shot eyes; the fiery breath from his breast scorched his dry lips, an unquenchable thirst devoured his burning throat; the little night lamp was burning as usual, and its dim light made thousands of phantoms dance before his wandering eyes.

And then a horrible vision — he saw La Mole get out of bed, and after walking up and down the room two or three times, as the sparrow-hawk flits before the little bird it is trying to fascinate, come toward him with his fist clinched.

Coconnas seized his poniard and prepared to plunge it into his enemy.

La Mole kept coming nearer.

Coconnas muttered:

"Ah! here you are again! you are always here! Come on! You threaten me, do you! you smile! Come, come, come! ah, you still keep coming nearer, a step at a time! Come, come, and let me kill you."

And suiting the action to the word, just as La Mole bent down to him, Coconnas flashed out the poniard from under the clothes; but the effort he made in rising exhausted him, the

weapon dropped from his hand, and he fell back upon his pillow.

"There, there!" said La Mole, gently lifting his head; "drink this, my poor fellow, for you are burning up."

It was really a cup La Mole presented to Coconnas, who in the wild excitement of his delirium took it to be a threatening fist.

But at the nectarous sensation of this beneficent draught, soothing his lips and cooling his throat, Coconnas's reason, or rather his instinct, came back to him, a never before experienced feeling of comfort pervaded his frame; he turned an intelligent look at La Mole, who was supporting him in his arms, and smiling on him; and from those eyes, so lately glowing with fury, a tear rolled down his burning cheek, which drank it with avidity.

"*Mordi!*" whispered Coconnas, as he fell back on his bolster. "If I get over this, Monsieur de la Mole, you shall be my friend."

"And you will get over it," said La Mole, "if you will drink the other two cups, and have no more ugly dreams."

An hour afterward La Mole, assuming the duties of a nurse, and scrupulously carrying out the unknown doctor's orders, rose again, poured a second dose into the cup, and carried it to Coconnas, who instead of waiting for him with his poniard, received him with open arms, eagerly swallowed the potion, and calmly fell asleep.

The third cup had a no less marvellous effect. The sick man's breathing became more regular, his stiff limbs relaxed, a gentle perspiration diffused itself over his burning skin, and when Ambroise Paré visited him the next morning, he smiled complacently, saying:

"I answer for Monsieur de Coconnas now; and this will not be one of the least difficult cures I have effected."

This scene, half-dramatic, half-burlesque, and yet not lacking in a certain poetic touch when Coconnas's fierce ways were taken into consideration, resulted in the friendship which the two gentlemen had begun at the Inn of the *Belle Étoile*, and which had been so violently interrupted by the Saint Bartholomew night's occurrences, from that time forth taking on a new vigor and soon surpassing that of Orestes and Pylades by five sword-thrusts and one pistol-wound exchanged between them.

At all events, wounds old and new, slight or serious, were at

last in a fair way of cure. La Mole, faithful to his duties as nurse, would not forsake the sick-room until Coconnas was entirely well. As long as weakness kept the invalid on the bed, he lifted him, and when he began to improve he helped him to walk; in a word, he lavished on him all the attentions suggested by his gentle and affectionate disposition, and this care, together with the Piedmontese's natural vigor, brought about a more rapid convalescence than would have been expected.

However, one and the same thought tormented both the young men. Each had in his delirium apparently seen the woman he loved approach his couch, and yet, certainly since they had recovered their senses, neither Marguerite nor Madame de Nevers had entered the room. However, that was perfectly comprehensible; the one, wife of the King of Navarre, the other, the Duc de Guise's sister-in-law, could not have publicly shown two simple gentlemen such a mark of evident interest, could they? No! La Mole and Coconnas could not make any other reply to this question. But still the absence of the ladies, tantamount perhaps to utter forgetfulness, was not the less painful.

It is true the gentleman who had witnessed the duel had come several times, as if of his own accord, to inquire after them; it is true Gillonne had done the same; but La Mole had not ventured to speak to the one concerning the queen; Coconnas had not ventured to speak to the other of Madame de Nevers.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE GHOSTS.

For some time each of the young men kept his secret confined to his own heart. At last their reserve burst its barriers, and the thought which had so long occupied them escaped their lips, and both cemented their friendship by this final proof, without which there is no friendship, — namely, perfect confidence.

They were both madly in love — one with a princess and the other with a queen.

For these two poor suitors there was something frightful in

the almost insuperable distance separating them from the objects of their desires.

And yet hope is a sentiment so deeply rooted in man's heart that in spite of the madness of their love they hoped!

They both, as they recovered from their illness, took great pains with their personal appearance. Every man, even the most indifferent to physical appearance, has, at certain times, mute interviews with his looking-glass, signs of intelligence, after which he generally leaves his confidant, quite satisfied with the interview. Now our two young men were not persons whose mirrors were compelled to give them harsh advice. La Mole, delicate, pale, and elegant, had the beauty of distinction; Coconnas, powerful, large-framed, and fresh-colored, had the beauty of strength. He had more, for his recent illness had been of advantage to him. He had become thinner, grown paler, and the famous scar which had formerly caused him so much anxiety from its prismatic relationship to the rainbow had disappeared, giving promise, probably like the post-diluvian phenomenon, of a long series of lovely days and calm nights.

Moreover, the most delicate attentions continued to be lavished on the two wounded men, and each of them on the day when he was well enough to rise found a *robe-de-chambre* on the easy-chair nearest his bed; on the day when he was able to dress himself, a complete suit of clothes; moreover, in the pocket of each doublet was a well-filled purse, which they each kept, intending, of course, to return, in the proper time and place, to the unknown protector who watched over them.

This unknown protector could not be the prince in whose quarters the two young men resided, for the prince had not only never once paid them a visit, but he had not even sent to make any inquiry after them.

A vague hope whispered to each heart that this unknown protector was the woman he loved.

So the two wounded men awaited with intense impatience the moment when they could go out. La Mole, stronger and sooner cured than Coconnas, might have done so long before, but a kind of tacit convention bound him to his friend. It was agreed between them that the first time they went out they should make three calls:

The first should be upon the unknown doctor whose suave medicine had brought such a remarkable improvement in the inflammation of Coconnas's lungs.

The second to the dwelling of the defunct Maître La Hurière, where each of them had left his portmanteau and horse.

The third to the Florentine Réné, who, uniting to his title of perfumer that of magician, not only sold cosmetics and poisons, but also concocted philters and delivered oracles.

At length, after two months passed in convalescence and confinement, the long-looked-for day arrived.

We used the word "confinement;" the use of it is accurate because several times in their impatience they had tried to hasten that day; but each time a sentinel posted at the door had stopped their passage and they had learned that they could not step out unless Maître Ambroise Paré gave them their *exeat*.

Now, one day that clever surgeon, having come to the conclusion that the two invalids were, if not completely cured, at least on the road to complete recovery, gave them this *exeat*, and about two o'clock in the afternoon on a fine day in autumn, such as Paris sometimes offers to her astonished population, who have already laid up a store of resignation for the winter, the two friends, arm in arm, set foot outside the Louvre.

La Mole, finding to his great satisfaction, on an armchair, the famous cherry-colored mantle which he had folded so carefully before the duel, undertook to be Coconnas's guide, and Coconnas allowed himself to be guided without resistance or reflection. He knew that his friend was taking him to the unknown doctor's whose potion (not patented) had cured him in a single night, when all of Master Ambroise Paré's drugs were slowly killing him. He had divided the money in his purse into two parts, and intended a hundred rose-nobles for the anonymous Esculapius to whom his recovery was due. Coconnas was not afraid of death, but Coconnas was not the less satisfied to be alive and well, and so, as we see, he was intending to recompense his deliverer generously.

La Mole proceeded along the Rue de l'Astruce, the wide Rue Saint Honoré, the Rue des Prouvelles, and soon found himself on the Place des Halles. Near the ancient fountain, at the place which is at the present time called the Carreau des Holles, was an octagon stone building, surmounted by a vast wooden lantern, which was again surmounted by a pointed roof, on the top of which was a weathercock. This wooden lantern had eight openings, traversed, as that heraldic piece which they call the *fascis* traverses the field of blazonry, by a

kind of wooden wheel, which was divided in the middle, in order to admit in the holes cut in it for that purpose the head and hands of such sentenced person or persons as were exposed at one or more of these eight openings.

This singular arrangement, which had nothing like it in the surrounding buildings, was called the pillory.

An ill-constructed, irregular, crooked, one-eyed, limping house, the roof spotted with moss like a leper's skin, had, like a toadstool, sprung up at the foot of this species of tower.

This house was the executioner's.

A man was exposed, and was thrusting out his tongue at the passers-by; he was one of the robbers who had been following his profession near the gibbet of Montfaucon, and had by ill luck been arrested in the exercise of his functions.

Coconnas believed that his friend had brought him to see this singular spectacle, and he joined the crowd of sightseers who were replying to the patient's grimaces by vociferations and gibes.

Coconnas was naturally cruel, and the sight very much amused him, only he would have preferred that instead of gibes and vociferations they had thrown stones at a convict so insolent as to thrust out his tongue at the noble lords that condescended to visit him.

So when the moving lantern was turned on its base, in order to show the culprit to another portion of the square, and the crowd followed, Coconnas would have accompanied them, had not La Mole checked him, saying, in a low tone:

"We did not come here for this."

"Well, what did we come for, then?" asked Coconnas.

"You will see," replied La Mole.

The two friends had got into the habit of addressing each other with the familiar "thee" and "thou" ever since the morning of that famous night when Coconnas had tried to thrust his poniard into La Mole's vitals. And he led Coconnas directly to a small window in the house which abutted on the tower; a man was leaning on the window-sill.

"Aha! here you are, gentlemen," said the man, raising his blood-red cap, and showing his thick black hair, which came down to his eyebrows. "You are welcome."

"Who is this man?" inquired Coconnas, endeavoring to recollect, for it seemed to him he had seen that face during one of the crises of his fever.

"Your preserver, my dear friend," replied La Mole; "he who brought to you at the Louvre that refreshing drink which did you so much good."

"Oho!" said Coconnas; "in that case, my friend" —

And he held out his hand to him.

But the man, instead of returning the gesture, drew himself up and withdrew from the two friends just the distance occupied by the curve of his body.

"Sir!" he said to Coconnas, "thanks for the honor you wish to confer on me, but it is probable that if you knew me you would not do so."

"Faith!" said Coconnas, "I declare that, even if you were the devil himself, I am very greatly obliged to you, for if it had not been for you I should be dead at this time."

"I am not exactly the devil," replied the man in the red cap; "but yet persons are frequently found who would rather see the devil than me."

"Who are you, pray?" asked Coconnas.

"Sir," replied the man, "I am Maître Caboche, the executioner of the provostry of Paris" —

"Ah" — said Coconnas, withdrawing his hand.

"You see!" said Maître Caboche.

"No, no; I will touch your hand, or may the devil fetch me! Hold it out" —

"Really?"

"Wide as you can."

"Here it is."

"Open it — wider — wider!"

And Coconnas took from his pocket the handful of gold he had prepared for his anonymous physician and placed it in the executioner's hand.

"I would rather have had your hand entirely and solely," said Maître Caboche, shaking his head, "for I do not lack money, but I am in need of hands to touch mine. Never mind. God bless you, my dear gentleman."

"So then, my friend," said Coconnas, looking at the executioner with curiosity, "it is you who put men to the rack, who break them on the wheel, quarter them, cut off heads, and break bones. Aha! I am very glad to have made your acquaintance."

"Sir," said Maître Caboche, "I do not do all myself; just as you noble gentlemen have your lackeys to do what you do

not choose to do yourself, so have I my assistants, who do the coarser work and despatch clownish fellows. Only when, by chance, I have to do with folks of quality, like you and your companion, for instance, ah! then it is another thing, and I take a pride in doing everything myself, from first to last, — that is to say, from the first putting of the *question*, to the decapitation."

In spite of himself, Coconnas felt a shudder pervade his veins, as if the brutal wedge was pressing his leg — as if the edge of the axe was against his neck.

La Mole, without being able to account for it, felt the same sensation.

But Coconnas overcame the emotion, of which he was ashamed, and desirous of taking leave of Maître Caboche with a jest on his lips, said to him:

"Well, master, I hold you to your word, and when it is my turn to mount Enguerrand de Marigny's gallows or Monsieur de Nemours's scaffold you alone shall lay hands on me."

"I promise you."

"Then, this time here is my hand, as a pledge that I accept your promise," said Coconnas.

And he offered the executioner his hand, which the latter touched timidly with his own, although it was evident that he had a great desire to grasp it warmly.

At this light touch Coconnas turned rather pale; but the same smile lingered on his lips, while La Mole, ill at ease, and seeing the crowd turn as the lantern did and come toward them, touched his cloak.

Coconnas, who in reality had as great a desire as La Mole to put an end to this scene, which by the natural bent of his character he had delayed longer than he would have wished, nodded to the executioner and went his way.

"Faith!" said La Mole, when he and his companion had reached the Croix du Trahoir, "I must confess we breathe more freely here than in the Place des Halles."

"Decidedly," replied Coconnas; "but I am none the less glad at having made Maître Caboche's acquaintance. It is well to have friends everywhere."

"Even at the sign of the *Belle Étoile*," said La Mole, laughing.

"Oh! as for poor Maître La Hurière," said Coconnas, "he is dead and dead again. I saw the arquebuse spitting flame, I

heard the thump of the bullet, which sounded as if it had struck against the great bell of Notre-Dame, and I left him stretched out in the gutter with streams of blood flowing from his nose and mouth. Taking it for granted that he is a friend, he is a friend we shall have in the next world."

Thus chatting, the two young men entered the Rue de l'Arbre Sec and proceeded toward the sign of the *Belle Étoile*, which was still creaking in the same place, still presenting to the traveller its astronomic hearth and its appetizing inscription. Coconnas and La Mole expected to find the house in a desperate state, the widow in mourning, and the little ones wearing crêpe on their arms; but to their great astonishment they found the house in full swing of activity, Madame La Hurière mightily resplendent, and the children gayer than ever.

"Oh, the faithless creature!" cried La Mole; "she must have married again."

Then addressing the new Artémise:

"Madame," said he, "we are two gentlemen, acquaintances of poor Monsieur La Hurière. We left here two horses and two portmanteaus which we have come to claim."

"Gentlemen," replied the mistress of the house, after she had tried to bring them to her recollection, "as I have not the honor of knowing you, with your permission I will go and call my husband. Grégoire, ask your master to come."

Grégoire stepped from the first kitchen, which was the general pandemonium, into the second, which was the laboratory where Maître La Hurière in his life-time had been in the habit of concocting the dishes which he felt deserved to be prepared by his clever hands.

"The devil take me," muttered Coconnas, "if it does not make me feel badly to see this house so gay when it ought to be so melancholy. Poor La Hurière!"

"He tried to kill me," said La Mole, "but I pardon him with all my heart."

La Mole had hardly uttered these words when a man appeared holding in his hand a stew-pan, in the bottom of which he was browning some onions, stirring them with a wooden spoon.

La Mole and Coconnas gave vent to a cry of amazement.

As they did so the man lifted his head and, replying by a similar cry, dropped his stew-pan, retaining in his hand only his wooden spoon.

"*In nomine Patris*," said the man, waving his spoon as he

would have done with a holy-water sprinkler, "*et Filii, et Spiritus sancti*" —

"Maître La Hurière!" exclaimed the two young men.

"Messieurs de Coconnas and de la Mole!" cried La Hurière.

"So you are not dead?" asked Coconnas.

"Why! can it be that you are alive?" asked the landlord.

"Nevertheless, I saw you fall," said Coconnas, "I heard the crash of the bullet, which broke something in you, I don't know what. I left you lying in the gutter, with blood streaming out of your nose, out of your mouth, and even out of your eyes."

"All that is as true as the gospel, Monsieur de Coconnas. But the noise you heard was the bullet striking against my sallat, on which fortunately it flattened itself; but the blow was none the less severe, and the proof of it," added La Hurière, lifting his cap and displaying a pate as bald as a man's knee, "is that as you see I have not a spear of hair left."

The two young men burst out laughing when they saw his grotesque appearance.

"Aha! you laugh, do you?" said La Hurière, somewhat reassured, "you do not come, then, with any evil intentions."

"Now tell us, Maître La Hurière, are you entirely cured of your bellicose inclinations?"

"Faith, that I am, gentlemen; and now" —

"Well, and now" —

"Now I have vowed not to meddle with any other fire than that in my kitchen."

"Bravo!" cried Coconnas, "see how prudent he is! Now," added the Piedmontese, "we left in your stables two horses, and in your rooms two portmanteaus."

"Oh, the devil!" replied the landlord, scratching his ear.

"Well?"

"Two horses, you say?"

"Yes, in your stable."

"And two portmanteaus?"

"Yes, in the rooms we had."

"The truth is, don't you see — you thought I was dead, didn't you?"

"Certainly we did."

"You will agree that as you were mistaken, I also might be."

"What? In believing that we also were dead? You were perfectly free."

"Now that 's it. You see, as you died intestate," continued Maître La Hurière.

"Go on" —

"I believed something, I was mistaken, I see it now" —

"Tell us, what was it you believed?"

"I believed that I might consider myself your heir."

"Oho!" exclaimed the two young men.

"Nevertheless, I could not be more grateful to find that you are alive, gentlemen."

"So you sold our horses, did you?" asked Coconnas.

"Alas!" cried La Hurière.

"And our portmanteaus?" insisted La Mole.

"Oh! your portmanteaus? Oh, no," cried La Hurière, "only what was in them."

"Now look here, La Mole," persisted Coconnas, "it seems to me that this is a bold rascal; suppose we disembowel him!"

This threat seemed to have great effect on Maître La Hurière, who stammered out these words:

"Well, gentlemen, I rather think the affair can be arranged."

"Listen!" said La Mole, "I am the one who has the greatest cause of complaint against you."

"Certainly, Monsieur le Comte, for I recollect that in a moment of madness I had the audacity to threaten you."

"Yes, with a bullet which flew only a couple of inches above my head."

"Do you think so?"

"I am certain of it."

"If you are certain of it, Monsieur de la Mole," said La Hurière, picking up his stew-pan with an innocent air, "I am too thoroughly at your service to give you the lie."

"Well," said La Mole, "as far as I am concerned I make no demand upon you."

"What, my dear gentleman" —

"Except" —

"Aïe! aïe!" groaned La Hurière.

"Except a dinner for myself and my friends every time I find myself in your neighborhood."

"How is this?" exclaimed La Hurière in an ecstasy. "I am at your service, my dear gentleman; I am at your service."

"So it is a bargain, is it?"

"With all my heart — and you, Monsieur de Coconnas," continued the landlord, "do you agree to the bargain?"

"Yes; but, like my friend, I must add one small condition."

"What is that?"

"That you restore to Monsieur de la Mole the fifty crowns which I owe him, and which I put into your keeping."

"To me, sir? When was that?"

"A quarter of an hour before you sold my horse and my portmanteau."

La Hurière showed that he understood.

"Ah! I remember," said he; and he stepped toward a cupboard and took out from it, one after the other, fifty crowns, which he brought to La Mole.

"Very well, sir," said that gentleman; "very well. Serve me an omelet. The fifty crowns are for Grégoire."

"Oh!" cried La Hurière; "in truth, my dear gentlemen, you are genuine princes, and you may count on me for life and for death."

"If that is so," said Coconnas, "make us the omelet we want, and spare neither butter nor lard."

Then looking at the clock,

"Faith, you are right, La Mole," said he, "we still have three hours to wait, and we may as well be here as anywhere else. All the more because, if I am not mistaken, we are already half way to the Pont Saint Michel."

And the two young men went and sat down at table in the very same room and at the very same place which they had occupied during that memorable evening of the twenty-sixth of August, 1572, when Coconnas had proposed to La Mole to play each against the other the first mistress which they should have!

Let us grant for the honor of the morality of our two young men that neither of them this evening had the least idea of making such a proposition to his companion.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ABODE OF MAÎTRE RÉNÉ, PERFUMER TO THE QUEEN MOTHER.

At the period of this history there existed in Paris, for passing from one part of the city to another, but five bridges, some of stone and the others of wood, and they all led to the Cité; there were le Pont des Meuniers, le Pont au Change, le Pont Notre-Dame, le Petit Pont, and le Pont Saint Michel.

In other places when there was need of crossing the river there were ferries.

These five bridges were loaded with houses like the Pont Vecchio at Florence at the present time. Of these five bridges, each of which has its history, we shall now speak more particularly of the Pont Saint Michel.

The Pont Saint Michel had been built of stone in 1373; in spite of its apparent solidity, a freshet in the Seine undermined a part of it on the thirty-first of January, 1408; in 1416 it had been rebuilt of wood; but during the night of December 16, 1547, it was again carried away; about 1550, in other words twenty-two years anterior to the epoch which we have reached, it was again built of wood, and though it needed repairs it was regarded as solid enough.

In the midst of the houses which bordered the line of the bridge, facing the small islet on which the Templers had been burnt, and where at the present time the platform of the Pont Neuf rests, stood a wooden panelled house over which a large roof impended like the lid of an immense eye. At the only window, which opened on the first story, over the window and door of the ground floor, hermetically sealed, shone a reddish light, which attracted the attention of the passers-by to the low, wide façade, painted blue, with rich gold mouldings. A kind of frieze separating the ground floor from the first floor represented groups of devils in the most grotesque postures imaginable; and a wide scroll painted blue like the façade ran between the frieze and the window, with this inscription: "René, Florentin, Perfumer de sa Majesté la Reine Mère."

The door of this shop was, as we have said, well bolted; but it was defended from nocturnal attacks better than by bolts by its occupant's reputation, so redoubtable that the passengers

over the bridge usually described a curve which took them to the opposite row of houses, as if they feared the very smell of the perfumes that might exhale through the walls.

More than this, the right and left hand neighbors, doubtless fearing that they might be compromised by the proximity, had, since Maître Réné's occupancy of the house, taken their departure one after the other so that the two houses next to Réné's were left empty and closed. Yet, in spite of this solitude and desertedness, belated passers-by had frequently seen, glittering through the crevices of the shutters of these empty habitations, strange rays of light, and had felt certain they heard strange noises like groans, which proved that some beings frequented these abodes, although they did not know if they belonged to this world or the other.

The result was that the tenants of the two buildings contiguous to the two empty houses from time to time queried whether it would not be wise in them to do as their neighbors had done.

It was, doubtless, owing to the privilege which the dread of him, widely circulated, had procured for him, that Maître Réné had ventured to keep up a light after the prescribed hour. No round or guard, moreover, would have dared to molest him, a man doubly dear to her majesty as her fellow-countryman and perfumer.

As we suppose that the reader, panoplied by the philosophical wisdom of this century, no longer believes in magic or magicians, we will invite him to accompany us into this dwelling which, at that epoch of superstitious faith, shed around it such a profound terror.

The shop on the ground floor is dark and deserted after eight o'clock in the evening — the hour at which it closes, not to open again until next morning; there it is that the daily sale of perfumery, unguents, and cosmetics of all kinds, such as a skilful chemist makes, takes place. Two apprentices aid him in the retail business, but do not sleep in the house; they lodge in the Rue de la Colandre.

In the evening they take their departure an instant before the shop closes; in the morning they wait at the door until it opens.

This ground-floor shop is therefore dark and deserted, as we have said.

In this shop, which is large and deep, there are two doors, each leading to a staircase. One of these staircases is in the

wall itself and is lateral, and the other is exterior and visible from the quay now called the Quai des Augustins, and from the riverbank, now called the Quai des Orfévres.

Both lead to the principal room on the first floor. This room is of the same size as the ground floor, except that it is divided into two compartments by tapestry suspended in the centre and parallel to the bridge. At the end of the first compartment opens the door leading to the exterior staircase. On the side face of the second opens the door of the secret staircase. This door is invisible, being concealed by a large carved cupboard fastened to it by iron cramps, and moving with it when pushed open. Catharine alone, besides Réné, knows the secret of this door, and by it she comes and departs; and with eye or ear placed against the cupboard, in which are several small holes, she sees and hears all that occurs in the chamber.

Two other doors, visible to all eyes, present themselves at the sides of the second compartment. One opens into a small chamber lighted from the roof, and having nothing in it but a large stove, some alembecs, retorts, and crucibles: it is the alchemist's laboratory; the other opens into a cell more singular than the rest of the apartment, for it is not lighted at all — has neither carpet nor furniture, but only a kind of stone altar.

The floor slopes from the centre to the ends, and from the ends to the base of the wall is a kind of gutter ending in a funnel, through whose orifice may be seen the dark waters of the Seine. On nails driven into the walls are hung singular-shaped instruments, all keen or pointed with points as fine as a needle and edges as sharp as a razor; some shine like mirrors; others, on the contrary, are of a dull gray or murky blue.

In a corner are two black fowls struggling with each other and tied together by the claws. This is the soothsayer's sanctuary.

Let us return to the middle chamber, that with two compartments.

Here the common herd of clients are introduced; here ibises from Egypt; mummies, with gilded bands; the crocodile, yawning from the ceiling; death's-heads, with eyeless sockets and loose teeth; and old musty volumes, torn and rat-eaten, are presented to the visitor's eye in pellmell confusion. Behind the curtain are phials, singularly shaped boxes, and weird-looking vases; all this is lighted up by two small silver

lamps exactly alike, perhaps stolen from some altar of Santa Maria Novella or the Church Dei Lervi of Florence; these, supplied with perfumed oil, cast their yellow flames around the sombre vault from which each hangs by three blackened chains.

Réné, alone, his arms crossed, is pacing up and down the second compartment with long strides, and shaking his head. After a lengthened and painful musing he pauses before an hour-glass:

"Ah! ah!" says he, "I forget to turn it; and perhaps the sand has all run through a long time ago."

Then, looking at the moon as it struggled through a heavy black cloud which seemed to hang over Notre-Dame, he said: "It is nine o'clock. If she comes, she will come, as usual, in an hour or an hour and a half; then there will be time for all."

At this moment a noise was heard on the bridge. Réné applied his ear to the orifice of a long tube, the other end of which reached down the street, terminating in a heraldic viper-head.

"No," he said, "it is neither *she* nor *they*; it is men's footsteps, and they stop at my door — they are coming here."

And three sharp knocks were heard at the door.

Réné hurried downstairs and put his ear against the door, without opening it.

The three sharp blows were repeated.

"Who 's there?" asked Maître Réné.

"Must we mention our names?" inquired a voice.

"It is indispensable," replied Réné.

"Well, then, I am the Comte Annibal de Coconnas," said the same voice.

"And I am the Comte Lerac de la Mole," said another voice, which had not as yet been heard.

"Wait, wait, gentlemen, I am at your service."

And at the same moment Réné drew the bolts and, lifting the bars, opened the door to the two young men locking it after him. Then, conducting them by the exterior staircase, he introduced them into the second compartment.

La Mole, as he entered, made the sign of the cross under his cloak. He was pale, and his hand trembled without his being able to repress this symptom of weakness.

Coconnas looked at everything, one after the other; and seeing the door of the cell, was about to open it.

"Allow me to observe, my dear young gentleman," said Réné, in his deep voice, and placing his hand on Coconnas's, "those that do me the honor of a visit have access only to this part of the room."

"Oh, very well," replied Coconnas; "besides, I feel like sitting down." And he took a seat.

There was unbroken silence for a moment — Maître Réné was waiting for one or the other of the young men to open the conversation.

"Maître Réné," at length said Coconnas, "you are a skilful man, and I pray you tell me if I shall always remain a sufferer from my wound — that is, always experience this shortness of breath, which prevents me from riding on horseback, using my sword, and eating larded omelettes?"

Réné put his ear to Coconnas's chest and listened attentively to the play of the lungs.

"No, Monsieur le Comte," he replied, "you will get well."

"Really?"

"Yes, I assure you."

"Well, you fill me with delight."

There was silence once more.

"Is there nothing else you would desire to know, M. le Comte?"

"I wish to know," said Coconnas, "if I am really in love?"

"You are," replied Réné.

"How do you know?"

"Because you asked the question."

"By Heaven! you are right. But with whom?"

"With her who now, on every occasion, uses the oath you have just uttered."

"Ah!" said Coconnas, amazed; "Maître Réné, you are a clever man! Now, La Mole, it is your turn."

La Mole reddened, and seemed embarrassed.

"I, Monseiur Réné," he stammered, and speaking more firmly as he proceeded, "do not care to ask you if I am in love, for I know that I am, and I do not hide it from myself; but tell me, shall I be beloved in return? for, in truth, all that at first seemed propitious now turns against me."

"Perchance you have not done all you should do."

"What is there to do, sir, but to testify, by one's respect and devotion to the lady of one's thoughts, that she is really and profoundly beloved?"

"You know," replied Réné, "that these demonstrations are frequently very meaningless."

"Then must I despair?"

"By no means; we must have recourse to science. In human nature there are antipathies to be overcome — sympathies which may be forced. Iron is not the lodestone; but by rubbing it with a lodestone we make it, in its turn, attract iron."

"Yes, yes," muttered La Mole; "but I have an objection to all these sorceries."

"Ah, then, if you have any such objections, you should not come here," answered Réné.

"Come, come, this is child's play!" interposed Coconnas. "Maître Réné, can you show me the devil?"

"No, Monsieur le Comte."

"I 'm sorry for that; for I had a word or two to say to him, and it might have encouraged La Mole."

"Well, then, let it be so," said La Mole, "let us go to the point at once. I have been told of figures modelled in wax to look like the beloved object. Is that one way?"

"An infallible one."

"And there is nothing in the experiment likely to affect the life or health of the person beloved?"

"Nothing."

"Let us try, then."

"Shall I make first trial?" said Coconnas.

"No," said La Mole, "since I have begun, I will go through to the end."

"Is your desire mighty, ardent, imperious to know what the obstacle is, Monsieur de la Mole?"

"Oh," exclaimed La Mole, "I am dying with anxiety."

At this moment some one rapped lightly at the street door —so lightly that no one but Maître Réné heard the noise, doubtless because he had been expecting it.

Without any hesitation he went to the speaking-tube and put his ear to the mouthpiece, at the same time asking La Mole several idle questions. Then he added, suddenly:

"Now put all your energy into your wish, and call the person whom you love."

La Mole knelt, as if about to address a divinity; and Réné, going into the other compartment, went out noiselessly by the exterior staircase, and an instant afterward light steps trod the floor of his shop.

When La Mole rose he beheld before him Maître Réné. The Florentine held in his hand a small wax figure, very indifferently modelled; it wore a crown and mantle.

"Do you desire to be always beloved by your royal mistress?" demanded the perfumer.

"Yes, even if it cost me my life — even if my soul should be the sacrifice!" replied La Mole.

"Very good," said the Florentine, taking with the ends of his fingers some drops of water from a ewer and sprinkling them over the figure, at the same time muttering certain Latin words.

La Mole shuddered, believing that some sacrilege was committed.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"I am christening this figure with the name of Marguerite."

"What for?"

"To establish a sympathy."

La Mole opened his mouth to prevent his going any further, but a mocking look from Coconnas stopped him.

Réné, who had noticed the impulse, waited. "Your absolute and undivided will is necessary," he said.

"Go on," said La Mole.

Réné wrote on a small strip of red paper some cabalistic characters, put it into the eye of a steel needle, and with the needle pierced the small wax model in the heart.

Strange to say, at the orifice of the wound appeared a small drop of blood; then he set fire to the paper.

The heat of the needle melted the wax around it and dried up the spot of blood.

"Thus," said Réné, "by the power of sympathy, your love shall pierce and burn the heart of the woman whom you love."

Coconnas, true to his repute as a bold thinker, laughed in his mustache, and in a low tone jested; but La Mole, desperately in love and full of superstition, felt a cold perspiration start from the roots of his hair.

"And now," continued Réné, "press your lips to the lips of the figure, and say: 'Marguerite, I love thee! Come, Marguerite!'"

La Mole obeyed.

At this moment the door of the second chamber was heard to open, and light steps approached. Coconnas, curious and incredulous, drew his poniard, and fearing that if he raised

the tapestry Réné would repeat what he said about the door, he cut a hole in the thick curtain, and applying his eye to the hole, uttered a cry of astonishment, to which two women's voices responded.

"What is it?" exclaimed La Mole, nearly dropping the waxen figure, which Réné caught from his hands.

"Why," replied Coconnas, "the Duchesse de Nevers and Madame Marguerite are there!"

"There, now, you unbelievers!" replied Réné, with an austere smile; "do you still doubt the force of sympathy?"

La Mole was petrified on seeing the queen; Coconnas was amazed at beholding Madame de Nevers. One believed that Réné's sorceries had evoked the phantom Marguerite; the other, seeing the door half open, by which the lovely phantoms had entered, gave at once a worldly and substantial explanation to the mystery.

While La Mole was crossing himself and sighing enough to split a rock, Coconnas, who had taken time to indulge in philosophical questionings and to drive away the foul fiend with the aid of that holy water sprinkler called scepticism, having observed, through the hole in the curtain, the astonishment shown by Madame de Nevers and Marguerite's somewhat caustic smile, judged the moment to be decisive, and understanding that a man may say in behalf of a friend what he cannot say for himself, instead of going to Madame de Nevers, went straight to Marguerite, and bending his knee, after the fashion of the great Artaxerxes as represented in the farces of the day, cried, in a voice to which the whistling of his wound added a peculiar accent not without some power:

"Madame, this very moment, at the demand of my friend the Comte de la Mole, Maître Réné was evoking your spirit; and to my great astonishment, your spirit is accompanied with a body most dear to me, and which I recommend to my friend. Shade of her majesty the Queen of Navarre, will you desire the body of your companion to come to the other side of the curtain?"

Marguerite began to laugh, and made a sign to Henriette, who passed to the other side of the curtain.

"La Mole, my friend," continued Coconnas, "be as eloquent as Demosthenes, as Cicero, as the Chancellor de l'Hôpital! and be assured that my life will be imperilled if you do not per-

suade the body of Madame de Nevers that I am her most devoted, most obedient, and most faithful servant."

"But" — stammered La Mole.

"Do as I say! And you, Maître Réné, watch that we are not interrupted."

Réné did as Coconnas asked.

"By Heaven, monsieur," said Marguerite, "you are a clever man. I am listening to you. What have you to say?"

"I have to say to you, madame, that the shadow of my friend — for he is a shadow, and he proves it by not uttering a single little word — I say, that this shadow begs me to use the faculty which material bodies possess of speaking so as to be understood, and to say to you: Lovely shadow, the gentleman thus disembodied has lost his whole body and all his breath by the cruelty of your eyes. If this were really you, I should ask Maître Réné to plunge me in some sulphurous pit rather than use such language to the daughter of King Henry II., to the sister of King Charles IX., to the wife of the King of Navarre. But shades are freed from all earthly pride and they are never angry when men love them. Therefore, pray your body, madame, to love the soul of this poor La Mole a little — a soul in trouble, if ever there was one; a soul first persecuted by friendship, which three times thrust into him several inches of cold steel; a soul burnt by the fire of your eyes — fire a thousand times more consuming than all the flames of hell. So have pity on this poor soul! Love a little what was the handsome La Mole; and if you no longer possess speech, ah! bestow a gesture, bestow a smile upon him. My friend's soul is a very intelligent soul, and will comprehend everything. Be kind to him, then; or, by Heaven! I will run my sword through Réné's body in order that, by virtue of the power which he possesses over spirits, he may force yours, which he has already so opportunely evoked, to do all a shade so amiably disposed as yours appears to be should do."

At this burst of eloquence delivered by Coconnas as he stood in front of the queen like Æneas descending into Hades, Marguerite could not refrain from a hearty burst of laughter, yet, preserving the silence which on such an occasion may be the supposed characteristic of a royal shade, she presented her hand to Coconnas. He took it daintily in his, and, calling to La Mole, said:

"Shade of my friend, come hither instantly!"

La Mole, amazed, overcome, silently obeyed.

"'T is well," said Coconnas, taking him by the back of the head; "and now bring the shadow of your handsome brown countenance into contact with the white and vaporous hand before you."

And Coconnas, suiting the action to the word, raised the delicate hand to La Mole's lips, and kept them for a moment respectfully united, without the hand seeking to withdraw itself from the gentle pressure.

Marguerite had not ceased to smile, but Madame de Nevers did not smile at all; she was still trembling at the unexpected appearance of the two gentlemen. She was conscious that her awkwardness was increased by all the fever of a growing jealousy, for it seemed to her that Coconnas ought not thus to forget her affairs for those of others.

La Mole saw her eyebrows contracted, detected the flashing threat of her eyes, and in spite of the intoxicating fever to which his delight was insensibly urging him to succumb he realized the danger which his friend was running and perceived what he should try to do to rescue him.

So rising and leaving Marguerite's hand in Coconnas's, he grasped the Duchesse de Nevers's, and bending his knee he said:

"O loveliest — O most adorable of women — I speak of living women, and not of shades!" and he turned a look and a smile to Marguerite; "allow a soul released from its mortal envelope to repair the absence of a body fully absorbed by material friendship. Monsieur de Coconnas, whom you see, is only a man — a man of bold and hardy frame, of flesh handsome to gaze upon perchance, but perishable, like all flesh. *Omnis caro fenum.* Although this gentleman keeps on from morning to night pouring into my ears the most touching litanies about you, though you have seen him distribute as heavy blows as were ever seen in wide France — this champion, so full of eloquence in presence of a spirit, dares not address a woman. That is why he has addressed the shade of the queen, charging me to speak to your lovely body, and to tell you that he lays at your feet his soul and heart; that he entreats from your divine eyes a look in pity, from your rosy fingers a beckoning sign, and from your musical and heavenly voice those words which men can never forget; if not, he has supplicated another thing, and that is, in case he should not

soften you, you will run my sword — which is a real blade, for swords have no shadows except in the sunshine — run my sword right through his body for the second time, for he can live no longer if you do not authorize him to live exclusively for you." All the verve and comical exaggeration which Coconnas had put into his speech found their counterpart in the tenderness, the intoxicating vigor, and the mock humility which La Mole introduced into his supplication.

Henriette's eyes turned from La Mole, to whom she had listened till he ended, and rested on Coconnas, to see if the expression of that gentleman's countenance harmonized with his friend's ardent address. It seemed that she was satisfied, for blushing, breathless, conquered, she said to Coconnas, with a smile which disclosed a double row of pearls enclosed in coral:

"Is this true?"

"By Heaven!" exclaimed Coconnas, fascinated by her look, "it is true, indeed. Oh, yes, madame, it is true — true on your life — true on my death!"

"Come with me, then," said Henriette, extending to him her hand, while her eyes proclaimed the feelings of her heart.

Coconnas flung his velvet cap into the air and with one stride was at the young woman's side, while La Mole, recalled to Marguerite by a gesture, executed at the same time an amorous *chassez* with his friend.

Réné appeared at the door in the background.

"Silence!" he exclaimed, in a voice which at once damped all the ardor of the lovers; "silence!"

And they heard in the solid wall the sound of a key in a lock, and of a door grating on its hinges.

"But," said Marguerite, haughtily, "I should think that no one has the right to enter whilst we are here!"

"Not even the queen mother?" whispered Réné in her ear.

Marguerite instantly rushed out by the exterior staircase, leading La Mole after her; Henriette and Coconnas almost arm-in-arm followed them, all four taking flight, as fly at the first noise the birds seen engaged in loving parley on the boughs of a flowering shrub.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BLACK HENS.

It was time the two couples disappeared! Catharine was putting the key in the lock of the second door just as Coconnas and Madame de Nevers stepped out of the house by the lower entrance, and Catharine as she entered could hear the steps of the fugitives on the stairs.

She cast a searching glance around, and then fixing her suspicious eyes on Réné, who stood motionless, bowing before her, said:

"Who was that?"

"Some lovers, who are satisfied with the assurance I gave them that they are really in love."

"Never mind them," said Catharine, shrugging her shoulders; "is there no one else here?"

"No one but your majesty and myself."

"Have you done what I ordered you?"

"About the two black hens?"

"Yes!"

"They are ready, madame."

"Ah," muttered Catharine, "if you were a Jew!"

"Why a Jew, madame?"

"Because you could then read the precious treatises which the Hebrews have written about sacrifices. I have had one of them translated, and I found that the Hebrews did not look for omens in the heart or liver as the Romans did, but in the configuration of the brain, and in the shape of the letters traced there by the all-powerful hand of destiny."

"Yes, madame; so I have heard from an old rabbi."

"There are," said Catharine, "characters thus marked that reveal all the future. Only the Chaldean seers recommend" —

"Recommend — what?" asked Réné, seeing the queen hesitate.

"That the experiment shall be tried on the human brain, as more developed and more nearly sympathizing with the wishes of the consulter."

"Alas!" said Réné, "your majesty knows it is impossible."

"Difficult, at least," said Catharine; "if we had known this at Saint Bartholomew's, what a rich harvest we might have

had — The first convict — but I will think of it. Meantime, let us do what we can. Is the chamber of sacrifice prepared?"

"Yes, madame."

"Let us go there."

Réné lighted a taper made of strange substances, the odor of which, both insidious and penetrating as well as nauseating and stupefying, betokened the introduction of many elements; holding this taper up, he preceded Catharine into the cell.

Catharine selected from amongst the sacrificial instruments a knife of blue steel, while Réné took up one of the two fowls that were huddling in one corner, with anxious, golden eyes.

"How shall we proceed?"

"We will examine the liver of the one and the brain of the other. If these two experiments lead to the same result we must be convinced, especially if these results coincide with those we got before."

"Which shall we begin with?"

"With the liver."

"Very well," said Réné, and he fastened the bird down to two rings attached to the little altar, so that the creature, turned on its back, could only struggle, without stirring from the spot.

Catharine opened its breast with a single stroke of her knife; the fowl uttered three cries, and, after some convulsions, expired.

"Always three cries!" said Catharine; "three signs of death."

She then opened the body.

"And the liver inclining to the left, always to the left, — a triple death, followed by a downfall. 'T is terrible, Réné."

"We must see, madame, whether the presages from the second will correspond with those of the first."

Réné unfastened the body of the fowl from the altar and tossed it into a corner; then he went to the other, which, foreseeing what its fate would be by its companion's, tried to escape by running round the cell, and finding itself pent up in a corner flew over Réné's head, and in its flight extinguished the magic taper Catharine held.

"You see, Réné, thus shall our race be extinguished," said the queen; "death shall breathe upon it, and destroy it from the face of the earth! Yet three sons! three sons!" she murmured, sorrowfully.

Réné took from her the extinguished taper, and went into the adjoining room to relight it.

On his return he saw the hen hiding its head in the tunnel.

"This time," said Catharine, "I will prevent the cries, for I will cut off the head at once."

And accordingly, as soon as the hen was bound, Catharine, as she had said, severed the head at a single blow; but in the last agony the beak opened three times, and then closed forever.

"Do you see," said Catharine, terrified, "instead of three cries, three sighs? Always three! — they will all three die. All these spirits before they depart count and call three. Let us now see the prognostications in the head."

She severed the bloodless comb from the head, carefully opened the skull, and laying bare the lobes of the brain endeavored to trace a letter formed in the bloody sinuosities made by the division of the central pulp.

"Always so!" cried she, clasping her hands; "and this time clearer than ever; see here!"

Réné approached.

"What is the letter?" asked Catharine.

"An H," replied Réné.

"How many times repeated?"

Réné counted.

"Four," said he.

"Ay, ay! I see it! that is to say, HENRY IV. Oh," she cried, flinging the knife from her, "I am accursed in my posterity!"

She was terrible, that woman, pale as a corpse, lighted by the dismal taper, and clasping her bloody hands.

"He will reign!" she exclaimed with a sigh of despair; "he will reign!"

"He will reign!" repeated Réné, plunged in meditation.

Nevertheless, the gloomy expression of Catharine's face soon disappeared under the light of a thought which unfolded in the depths of her mind.

"Réné," said she, stretching out her hand toward the perfumer without lifting her head from her breast, "Réné, is there not a terrible history of a doctor at Perugia, who killed at once, by the aid of a pomade,[1] his daughter and his daughter's lover?"

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[1] The original has *à l'aide d'une promenade.*

"Yes, madame."

"And this lover was"—

"Was King Ladislas, madame."

"Ah, yes!" murmured she; "have you any of the details of this story?"

"I have an old book which mentions it," replied Réné.

"Well, let us go into the other room, and you can show it me."

They left the cell, the door of which Réné closed after him.

"Has your majesty any other orders to give me concerning the sacrifices?"

"No, Réné, I am for the present sufficiently convinced. We will wait till we can secure the head of some criminal, and on the day of the execution you must arrange with the hangman."

Réné bowed in token of obedience, then holding his candle up he let the light fall on the shelves where his books stood, climbed on a chair, took one down, and handed it to the queen.

Catharine opened it.

"What is this?" she asked; "'On the Method of Raising and Training Tercels, Falcons, and Gerfalcons to be Courageous, Valiant, and always ready for Flight.'"

"Ah! pardon me, madame, I made a mistake. That is a treatise on venery written by a scientific man of Lucca for the famous Castruccio Castracani. It stood next the other and was bound exactly like it. I took down the wrong one. However, it is a very precious volume; there are only three copies extant — one belongs to the library at Venice, the other was bought by your grandfather Lorenzo and was offered by Pietro de Médicis to King Charles VIII., when he visited Florence, and the third you have in your hands."

"I venerate it," said Catharine, "because of its rarity, but as I do not need it, I return it to you."

And she held out her right hand to Réné to receive the book which she wished, while with her left hand she returned to him the one which she had first taken.

This time Réné was not mistaken; it was the volume she wished. He stepped down, turned the leaves for a moment, and gave it to her open.

Catharine went and sat down at a table. Réné placed the magic taper near her and by the light of its bluish flame she read a few lines in an undertone:

"Good!" said she, shutting the book; "that is all I wanted to know."

She rose from her seat, leaving the book on the table, but bearing away the idea which had germinated in her mind and would ripen there.

Réné waited respectfully, taper in hand, until the queen, who seemed about to retire, should give him fresh orders or ask fresh questions.

Catharine, with her head bent and her finger on her mouth, walked up and down several times without speaking.

Then suddenly stopping before Réné, and fixing on him her eyes, round and piercing like a hawk's:

"Confess you have made for her some love-philter," said she.

"For whom?" asked Réné, starting.

"La Sauve."

"I, madame?" said Réné; "never!"

"Never?"

"I swear it on my soul."

"There must be some magic in it, however, for he is desperately in love with her, though he is not famous for his constancy."

"Who, madame?"

"He, Henry, the accursed, — he who is to succeed my three sons, — he who shall one day be called Henry IV., and is yet the son of Jeanne d'Albret."

And Catharine accompanied these words with a sigh which made Réné shudder, for he thought of the famous gloves he had prepared by Catharine's order for the Queen of Navarre.

"So he still runs after her, does he?" said Réné.

"He does," replied the queen.

"I thought that the King of Navarre was quite in love with his wife now."

"A farce, Réné, a farce! I know not why, but every one is seeking to deceive me. My daughter Marguerite is leagued against me; perhaps she, too, is looking forward to the death of her brothers; perhaps she, too, hopes to be Queen of France."

"Perhaps so," re-echoed Réné, falling back into his own reverie and echoing Catharine's terrible suspicion.

"Ha! we shall see," said Catharine, going to the main door, for she doubtless judged it useless to descend the secret stair, now that she was sure that they were alone.

Réné preceded her, and in a few minutes they stood in the perfumer's shop.

"You promised me some new kind of cosmetic for my hands and lips, Réné; the winter is at hand and you know how sensitive my skin is to the cold."

"I have already provided for this, madame; and I shall bring you some to-morrow."

"You would not find me in before nine o'clock to-morrow evening; I shall be occupied with my devotions during the day."

"I will be at the Louvre at nine o'clock, then, madame."

"Madame de Sauve has beautiful hands and beautiful lips," said Catharine in a careless tone. "What pomade does she use?"

"For her hands?"

"Yes, for her hands first."

"Heliotrope."

"What for her lips?"

"She is going to try a new opiate of my invention. I was going to bring your majesty a box of it at the same time."

Catharine mused an instant.

"She is certainly a very beautiful creature," said she, pursuing her secret thoughts; "and the passion of the Béarnais for her is not strange at all."

"And she is so devoted to your majesty," said Réné. "At least I should think so."

Catharine smiled and shrugged her shoulders.

"When a woman loves, is she faithful to any one but her lover? You must have given her some philter, Réné."

"I swear I have not, madame."

"Well, well; we 'll say no more about it. Show me this new opiate you spoke of, that is to make her lips fresher and rosier than ever."

Réné approached a shelf and showed Catharine six small boxes of the same shape, *i.e.*, round silver boxes ranged side by side.

"This is the only philter she ever asked me for," observed Réné; "it is true, as your majesty says, I composed it expressly for her, for her lips are so tender that the sun and wind affect them equally."

Catharine opened one of the boxes; it contained a most fascinating carmine paste.

"Give me some paste for my hands, Réné," said she; "I will take it away with me."

Réné took the taper, and went to seek, in a private compartment, what the queen asked for. As he turned, he fancied that he saw the queen quickly conceal a box under her mantle; he was, however, too familiar with these little thefts of the queen mother to have the rudeness to seem to perceive the movement; so wrapping the cosmetic she demanded in a paper bag, ornamented with fleurs-de-lis:

"Here it is, madame," he said.

"Thanks, Réné," returned the queen; then, after a moment's silence: "Do not give Madame de Sauve that paste for a week or ten days; I wish to make the first trial of it myself."

And she prepared to go.

"Your majesty, do you desire me to accompany you?" asked Réné.

"Only to the end of the bridge," replied Catharine; "my gentlemen and my litter wait for me there."

They left the house, and at the end of the Rue de la Barillerie four gentlemen on horseback and a plain litter were waiting.

On his return Réné's first care was to count his boxes of opiates. One was wanting.

CHAPTER XXI.

MADAME DE SAUVE'S APARTMENT.

CATHARINE was not deceived in her suspicions. Henry had resumed his former habits and went every evening to Madame de Sauve's. At first he accomplished this with the greatest secrecy; but gradually he grew negligent and ceased to take any precautions, so that Catharine had no trouble in finding out that while Marguerite was still nominally Queen of Navarre, Madame de Sauve was the real queen.

At the beginning of this story we said a word or two about Madame de Sauve's apartment; but the door opened by Dariole to the King of Navarre closed hermetically behind him, so that these rooms, the scene of the Béarnais's mysterious amours, are totally unknown to us. The quarters, like those furnished

by princes for their dependents in the palaces occupied by them in order to have them within reach, were smaller and less convenient than what she could have found in the city itself. As the reader already knows, they were situated on the second floor of the palace, almost immediately above those occupied by Henry himself. The door opened into a corridor, the end of which was lighted by an arched window with small leaded panes, so that even in the loveliest days of the year only a dubious light filtered through. During the winter, after three o'clock in the afternoon, it was necessary to light a lamp, but as this contained no more oil than in summer, it went out by ten o'clock, and thus, as soon as the winter days arrived, gave the two lovers the greatest security.

A small antechamber, carpeted with yellow flowered damask; a reception-room with hangings of blue velvet; a sleeping-room, the bed adorned with twisted columns and rose-satin curtains, enshrining a *ruelle* ornamented with a looking-glass set in silver, and two paintings representing the loves of Venus and Adonis, — such was the residence, or as one would say nowadays the nest, of the lovely lady-in-waiting to Queen Catharine de Médicis.

If one had looked sharply one would have found, opposite a toilet-table provided with every accessory, a small door in a dark corner of this room opening into a sort of oratory where, raised on two steps, stood a *priedieu*. In this little chapel on the wall hung three or four paintings, to the highest degree spiritual, as if to serve as a corrective to the two mythological pictures which we mentioned. Among these paintings were hung on gilded nails weapons such as women carried.

That evening, which was the one following the scenes which we have described as taking place at Maître Réné's, Madame de Sauve, seated in her bedroom on a couch, was telling Henry about her fears and her love, and was giving him as a proof of her love the devotion which she had shown on the famous night following Saint Bartholomew's, the night which, it will be remembered, Henry spent in his wife's quarters.

Henry on his side was expressing his gratitude to her. Madame de Sauve was charming that evening in her simple batiste wrapper; and Henry was very grateful.

At the same time, as Henry was really in love, he was dreamy. Madame de Sauve, who had come actually to love

instead of pretending to love as Catharine had commanded, kept gazing at Henry to see if his eyes were in accord with his words.

"Come, now, Henry," she was saying, "be honest; that night which you spent in the boudoir of her majesty the Queen of Navarre, with Monsieur de la Mole at your feet, did n't you feel sorry that that worthy gentleman was between you and the queen's bedroom?"

"Certainly I did, sweetheart," said Henry, "for the only way that I could reach this room where I am so comfortable, where at this instant I am so happy, was for me to pass through the queen's room."

Madame de Sauve smiled.

"And you have not been there since?"

"Only as I have told you."

"You will never go to her without informing me?"

"Never."

"Would you swear to it?"

"Certainly I would, if I were still a Huguenot, but" —

"But what?"

"But the Catholic religion, the dogmas of which I am now learning, teach me that one must never take an oath."

"Gascon!" exclaimed Madame de Sauve, shaking her head.

"But now it is my turn, Charlotte," said Henry. "If I ask you some questions, will you answer?"

"Certainly I will," replied the young woman, "I have nothing to hide from you."

"Now look here, Charlotte," said the king, "explain to me just for once how it came about that after the desperate resistance which you made to me before my marriage, you became less cruel to me who am an awkward Béarnais, an absurd provincial, a prince too poverty-stricken, indeed, to keep the jewels of his crown polished."

"Henry," said Charlotte, "you are asking the explanation of the enigma which the philosophers of all countries have been trying to determine for the past three thousand years! Henry, never ask a woman why she loves you; be satisfied with asking, 'Do you love me?'"

"Do you love me, Charlotte?" asked Henry.

"I love you," replied Madame de Sauve, with a fascinating smile, dropping her pretty hand into her lover's.

Henry retained the hand.

"But," he went on to say, following out his thought, "supposing I have guessed the word which the philosophers have been vainly trying to find for three thousand years — at least as far as you are concerned, Charlotte?"

Madame de Sauve blushed.

"You love me," pursued Henry, "consequently I have nothing else to ask you and I consider myself the happiest man in the world. But you know happiness is always accompanied by some lack. Adam, in the midst of Eden, was not perfectly happy, and he bit into that miserable apple which imposed upon us all that love for novelty that makes every one spend his life in the search for something unknown. Tell me, my darling, in order to help me to find mine, did n't Queen Catharine at first bid you love me?"

"Henry," exclaimed Madame de Sauve, "speak lower when you speak of the queen mother!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Henry, with a spontaneity and boldness which deceived Madame de Sauve herself, "it was a good thing formerly to distrust her, kind mother that she is, but then we were not on good terms; but now that I am her daughter's husband" —

"Madame Marguerite's husband!" exclaimed Charlotte, flushing with jealousy.

"Speak low in your turn," said Henry; "now that I am her daughter's husband we are the best friends in the world. What was it they wanted? For me to become a Catholic, so it seems. Well, grace has touched me, and by the intercession of Saint Bartholomew I have become one. We live together like brethren in a happy family — like good Christians."

"And Queen Marguerite?"

"Queen Marguerite?" repeated Henry; "oh, well, she is the link uniting us."

"But, Henry, you said that the Queen of Navarre, as a reward for the devotion I showed her, had been generous to me. If what you say is true, if this generosity, for which I have cherished deep gratitude toward her, is genuine, she is a connecting link easy to break. So you cannot trust to this support, for you have not made your pretended intimacy impose on any one."

"Still I do rest on it, and for three months it has been the bolster on which I have slept."

"Then, Henry!" cried Madame de Sauve, "you have deceived me, and Madame Marguerite is really your wife."

Henry smiled.

"There, Henry," said Madame de Sauve, "you have given me one of those exasperating smiles which make me feel the cruel desire to scratch your eyes out, king though you are."

"Then," said Henry, "I seem to be imposing now by means of this pretended friendship, since there are moments when, king though I am, you desire to scratch out my eyes, because you believe that it exists!"

"Henry! Henry!" said Madame de Sauve, "I believe that God himself does not know what your thoughts are."

"My sweetheart," said Henry, "I think that Catharine first told you to love me, next, that your heart told you the same thing, and that when those two voices are speaking to you, you hear only your heart's. Now here I am. I love you and love you with my whole heart, and that is the very reason why if ever I should have secrets I should not confide them to you,—for fear of compromising you, of course,—for the queen's friendship is changeable, it is a mother-in-law's."

This was not what Charlotte expected; it seemed to her that the thickening veil between her and her lover every time she tried to sound the depths of his bottomless heart was assuming the consistency of a wall, and was separating them from each other. So she felt the tears springing to her eyes as he made this answer, and as it struck ten o'clock just at that moment:

"Sire," said Charlotte, "it is my bed-time; my duties call me very early to-morrow morning to the queen mother."

"So you drive me away to-night, do you, sweetheart?"

"Henry, I am sad. As I am sad, you would find me tedious and you would not like me any more. You see that it is better for you to withdraw."

"Very good," said Henry, "I will withdraw if you insist upon it, only, *ventre saint gris!* you must at least grant me the favor of staying for your toilet."

"But Queen Marguerite, sire! won't you keep her waiting if you remain?"

"Charlotte," replied Henry, gravely, "it was agreed between us that we should never mention the Queen of Navarre, but it seems to me that this evening we have talked about nothing but her."

Madame de Sauve sighed; then she went and sat down before her toilet-table. Henry took a chair, pulled it along toward the one that served as his mistress's seat, and setting one knee on it while he leaned on the back of the other, he said:

"Come, my good little Charlotte, let me see you make yourself beautiful, and beautiful for me whatever you said. Heavens! What things! What scent-bottles, what powders, what phials, what perfumery boxes!"

"It seems a good deal," said Charlotte, with a sigh, "and yet it is too little, since with it all I have not as yet found the means of reigning exclusively over your majesty's heart."

"There!" exclaimed Henry; "let us not fall back on politics! What is that little fine delicate brush? Should it not be for painting the eyebrows of my Olympian Jupiter?"

"Yes, sire," replied Madame de Sauve, "and you have guessed at the first shot!"

"And that pretty little ivory rake?"

"'T is for parting the hair!"

"And that charming little silver box with a chased cover?"

"Oh, that is something Réné sent, sire; 't is the famous opiate which he has been promising me so long — to make still sweeter the lips which your majesty has been good enough sometimes to find rather sweet."

And Henry, as if to test what the charming woman said, touched his lips to the ones which she was looking at so attentively in the mirror. Now that they were returning to the field of coquetry, the cloud began to lift from the baroness's brow. She took up the box which had thus been explained, and was just going to show Henry how the vermilion salve was used, when a sharp rap at the antechamber door startled the two lovers.

"Some one is knocking, madame," said Dariole, thrusting her head through the opening of the portière.

"Go and find out who it is, and come back," said Madame de Sauve. Henry and Charlotte looked at each other anxiously, and Henry was beginning to think of retiring to the oratory, in which he had already more than once taken refuge, when Dariole reappeared.

"Madame," said she, "it is Maître Réné, the perfumer."

At this name Henry frowned, and involuntarily bit his lips.

"Do you want me to refuse him admission?" asked Charlotte.

"No!" said Henry; "Maître Réné never does anything without having previously thought about it. If he comes to you, it is because he has a reason for coming."

"In that case, do you wish to hide?"

"I shall be careful not to," said Henry, "for Maître Réné knows everything; therefore Maître Réné knows that I am here."

"But has not your majesty some reason for thinking his presence painful to you?"

"I!" said Henry, making an effort, which in spite of his will-power he could not wholly dissimulate. "I! none at all! we are rather cool to each other, it is true; but since the night of Saint Bartholomew we have been reconciled."

"Let him enter!" said Madame de Sauve to Dariole.

A moment later Réné appeared, and took in the whole room at a glance.

Madame de Sauve was still before her toilet-table.

Henry had resumed his place on the couch.

Charlotte was in the light, and Henry in the shadow.

"Madame," said Réné, with respectful familiarity, "I have come to offer my apologies."

"For what, Réné?" asked Madame de Sauve, with that condescension which pretty women always use towards the world of tradespeople who surround them, and whose duty it is to make them more beautiful.

"Because long ago I promised to work for these pretty lips, and because" —

"Because you did not keep your promise until to-day; is that it?" asked Charlotte.

"Until to-day?" repeated Réné.

"Yes; it was only to-day, in fact, this evening, that I received the box you sent me."

"Ah! indeed!" said Réné, looking strangely at the small opiate box on Madame de Sauve's table, which was precisely like those he had in his shop. "I thought so!" he murmured. "And you have used it?"

"No, not yet. I was just about to try it as you entered." Réné's face assumed a dreamy expression which did not escape Henry. Indeed, very few things escaped him.

"Well, Réné, what are you going to do now?" asked the king.

"I? Nothing, sire," said the perfumer, "I am humbly waiting until your majesty speaks to me, before taking leave of Madame la Baronne."

"Come, now!" said Henry, smiling. "Do you need my word to know that it is a pleasure to me to see you?"

Réné glanced around him, made a tour of the room as if to sound the doors and the curtains with his eye and ear, then he stopped and standing so that he could embrace at a glance both Madame de Sauve and Henry:

"I do not know it," said he, thanks to that admirable instinct which like a sixth sense guided him during the first part of his life in the midst of impending dangers. Henry felt that at that moment something strangely resembling a struggle was passing through the mind of the perfumer, and turned towards him, still in the shadow, while the Florentine's face was in the light.

"You here at this hour, Réné?" said he.

"Am I unfortunate enough to be in your majesty's way?" asked the perfumer, stepping back.

"No, but I want to know one thing."

"What, sire?"

"Did you think you would find me here?"

"I was sure of it."

"You wanted me, then?"

"I am glad to have found you, at least."

"Have you something to say to me?" persisted Henry.

"Perhaps, sire!" replied Réné.

Charlotte blushed, for she feared that the revelation which the perfumer seemed anxious to make might have something to do with her conduct towards Henry. Therefore she acted as though, having been wholly engrossed with her toilet, she had heard nothing, and interrupted the conversation.

"Ah! really, Réné," said she, opening the opiate box, "you are a delightful man. This cake is a marvellous color, and since you are here I am going to honor you by experimenting with your new production."

She took the box in one hand, and with the other touched the tip of her finger to the rose paste, which she was about to raise to her lips.

Réné gave a start.

The baroness smilingly lifted the opiate to her mouth.

Réné turned pale.

Still in the shadow, but with fixed and glowing eyes, Henry lost neither the action of the one nor the shudder of the other.

Charlotte's hand had but a short distance to go before it would touch her lips when Réné seized her arm, just as Henry rose to do so.

Henry fell back noiselessly on the couch.

"One moment, madame," said Réné, with a constrained smile, "you must not use this opiate without special directions."

"Who will give me these directions?"

"I."

"When?"

"As soon as I have finished saying what I have to say to his Majesty the King of Navarre."

Charlotte opened her eyes wide, understanding nothing of the mysterious language about her, and sat with the opiate pot in one hand, gazing at the tip of her finger, red with the rouge.

Henry rose, and moved by a thought which, like all those of the young king, had two sides, one which seemed superficial, the other which was deep, he took Charlotte's hand and red as it was, made as though to raise it to his lips.

"One moment," said Réné, quickly, "one moment! Be kind enough, madame, to rinse your lovely hands with this soap from Naples which I neglected to send you at the same time as the rouge, and which I have the honor of bringing you now."

Drawing from its silver wrapping a cake of green soap, he put it in a vermilion basin, poured some water over it, and, with one knee on the floor, offered it to Madame de Sauve.

"Why, really, Maître Réné, I no longer recognize you," said Henry, "you are so gallant that you far outstrip every court fop."

"Oh, what a delicious perfume!" cried Charlotte, rubbing her beautiful hands with the pearly foam made by the scented cake.

Réné performed his office of courtier to the end. He offered a napkin of fine Frisian linen to Madame de Sauve, who dried her hands on it.

"Now," said the Florentine to Henry. "Let your mind be at rest, monseigneur."

Charlotte gave her hand to Henry, who kissed it, and while she half turned on her chair to listen to what Réné was about to say, the King of Navarre returned to his couch, more convinced than ever that something unusual was passing through the mind of the perfumer.

"Well?" asked Charlotte. The Florentine apparently made an effort to collect all his strength, and then turned towards Henry.

CHAPTER XXII.

"SIRE, YOU SHALL BE KING."

"SIRE," said Réné to Henry, "I have come to speak of something which has been on my mind for some time."

"Perfumery?" said Henry, smiling.

"Well, yes, sire, — perfumery," replied Réné, with a singular nod of acquiescence.

"Speak, I am listening to you. This is a subject which has always interested me deeply."

Réné looked at Henry to try, in spite of his words, to read the impenetrable thought; but seeing that it was perfectly impossible, he continued:

"One of my friends, sire, has just arrived from Florence. This friend is greatly interested in astrology."

"Yes," interrupted Henry, "I know that it is a passion with Florentines."

"In company with the foremost students of the world he has read the horoscopes of the chief gentlemen of Europe."

"Ah! ah!" exclaimed Henry.

"And as the house of Bourbon is at the head of the highest, descended as it is from the Count of Clermont, the fifth son of Saint Louis, your majesty must know that your horoscope has not been overlooked."

Henry listened still more attentively.

"Do you remember this horosope?" said the King of Navarre, with a smile which he strove to render indifferent.

"Oh!" replied Réné, shaking his head, "your horoscope is not one to be forgotten."

"Indeed!" said Henry, ironically.

"Yes, sire; according to this horoscope your majesty is to have a most brilliant destiny."

The young prince gave a lightning glance which was almost at once lost under cover of indifference.

"Every Italian oracle is apt to flatter," said Henry; "but he who flatters lies. Are there not those who have predicted that I would command armies? I!" He burst out laughing. But an observer less occupied with himself than Réné would have noticed and realized the effort of this laugh.

"Sire," said Réné, coldly, "the horoscope tells better than that."

"Does it foretell that at the head of one of these armies I shall win battles?"

"Better than that, sire."

"Well," said Henry; "you will see that I shall be conqueror!"

"Sire, you shall be king."

"Well! *Ventre saint gris!*" exclaimed Henry, repressing a violent beating of his heart; "am I not that already?"

"Sire, my friend knows what he promises; not only will you be king, but you will reign."

"In that case," said Henry, in the same mocking tone, "your friend must have ten crowns of gold, must he not, Réné? for such a prophecy is very ambitious, especially in times like these. Well, Réné, as I am not rich, I will give your friend five now and five more when the prophecy is fulfilled."

"Sire," said Madame de Sauve, "do not forget that you are already pledged to Dariole, and do not overburden yourself with promises."

"Madame," said Henry, "I hope when this time comes that I shall be treated as a king, and that they will be satisfied if I keep half of my promises."

"Sire," said Réné, "I will continue."

"Oh, that is not all, then?" said Henry. "Well, if I am emperor, I will give twice as much."

"Sire, my friend has returned from Florence with the horoscope, which he renewed in Paris, and which always gives the same result; and he told me a secret."

"A secret of interest to his majesty?" asked Charlotte, quickly.

"I think so," said the Florentine.

"He is searching for words," thought Henry, without in any way coming to Réné's rescue. "Apparently the thing is difficult to tell."

"Speak, then," went on the Baroness de Sauve; "what is it about?"

"It is about all the rumors of poisoning," said the Florentine, weighing each of his words separately, "it is about all the rumors of poisoning which for some time have been circulated around court." A slight movement of the nostrils of the King of Navarre was the only indication of his increased attention at the sudden turn in the conversation.

"And your friend the Florentine," said Henry, "knows something about this poisoning?"

"Yes, sire."

"How can you tell me a secret which is not yours, Réné, especially when the secret is such an important one?" said Henry, in the most natural tone he could assume.

"This friend has some advice to ask of your majesty."

"Of me?"

"What is there surprising in that, sire? Remember the old soldier of Actium who, having a law-suit on hand, asked advice of Augustus."

"Augustus was a lawyer, Réné, and I am not."

"Sire, when my friend confided this secret to me, your majesty still belonged to the Calvinist party, of which you were the chief head, and of which Monsieur de Condé was the second."

"Well?" said Henry.

"This friend hoped that you would use your all-powerful influence over Monsieur de Condé and beg him not to be hostile to him."

"Explain this to me, Réné, if you wish me to understand it," said Henry, without betraying the least change in his face or voice.

"Sire, your majesty will understand at the first word. This friend knows all the particulars of the attempt to poison Monseigneur de Condé."

"There has been an attempt to poison the Prince de Condé?" exclaimed Henry with a well-assumed astonishment. "Ah, indeed, and when was this?"

Réné looked fixedly at the king, and replied merely by these words:

"A week ago, your majesty."

"Some enemy?" asked the king.

"Yes," replied Réné, "an enemy whom your majesty knows and who knows your majesty."

"As a matter of fact," said Henry, "I think I have heard this mentioned, but I am ignorant of the details which your friend has to reveal. Tell them to me."

"Well, a perfumed apple was offered to the Prince of Condé. Fortunately, however, when it was brought to him his physician was with him. He took it from the hands of the messenger and smelled it to test its odor and soundness. Two days later a gangrene swelling of the face, an extravasation of the blood, a running sore which ate away his face, were the price of his devotion or the result of his imprudence."

"Unfortunately," replied Henry, "being half Catholic already, I have lost all influence over Monsieur de Condé. Your friend was wrong, therefore, in addressing himself to me."

"It was not only in regard to the Prince de Condé that your majesty could be of use to my friend, but in regard to the Prince de Porcian also, the brother of the one who was poisoned."

"Ah!" exclaimed Charlotte, "do you know, Réné, that your stories partake of the gruesome? You plead at a poor time. It is late, your conversation is death-like. Really, your perfumes are worth more." Charlotte again extended her hand towards the opiate box.

"Madame," said Réné, "before testing that, as you are about to do, hear what cruel results wicked men can draw from it."

"Really, Réné," said the baroness, "you are funereal this evening."

Henry frowned, but he understood that Réné wished to reach a goal which he did not yet see, and he resolved to push towards this end the conversation which awakened in him such painful memories.

"And," he continued, "you knew the details of the poisoning of the Prince de Porcian?"

"Yes," said he. "It is known that every night he left a lamp burning near his bed; the oil was poisoned and he was asphyxiated."

Henry clinched his fingers, which were damp with perspiration.

"So," he murmured, "he whom you call your friend knows not only the details of the poisoning, but the author of it?"

"Yes, and it is for this reason that he wished to ask you if you would use over the Prince of Porcian the remains of that influence and have the murderer pardoned for the death of his brother."

"Unfortunately," replied Henry, "still being half Huguenot, I have no influence over Monsieur le Prince de Porcian; your friend therefore would have done wrong in speaking to me."

"But what do you think of the intentions of Monsieur le Prince de Condé and of Monsieur de Porcian?"

"How should I know their intentions, Réné? God, whom I may know, has not given me the privilege of reading their hearts."

"Your majesty must ask yourself," said the Florentine calmly. "Is there not in the life of your majesty some event so gloomy that it can serve as a test of clemency, so painful that it is a touchstone for generosity?"

These words were uttered in a tone which made Charlotte herself tremble. It was an allusion so direct, so pointed, that the young woman turned aside to hide her blush, and to avoid meeting Henry's eyes. Henry made a supreme effort over himself; his forehead, which during the words of the Florentine wore threatening lines, unbent, and he changed the dignified, filial grief which tightened his heart into vague meditation.

"In my life," said he, "a gloomy circumstance — no, Réné, no; I remember in my youth only folly and carelessness mingled with more or less cruel necessity imposed on every one by the demands of nature and the proofs of God."

Réné in turn became constrained as he glanced from Henry to Charlotte, as though to rouse the one and hold back the other; for Charlotte had returned to her toilet to hide the anxiety caused by their conversation, and had again extended her hand towards the opiate box.

"But, sire, if you were the brother of the Prince of Porcian or the son of the Prince of Condé, and if they had poisoned your brother or assassinated your father" — Charlotte uttered a slight cry and raised the opiate to her lips. Réné saw the gesture, but this time he stopped her neither by word nor gesture; he merely exclaimed:

"In Heaven's name, sire, answer! Sire, if you were in their place what would you do?"

Henry recovered himself. With trembling hand he wiped

his forehead, on which stood drops of cold perspiration, and rising to his full height, replied in the midst of the silence which until then had held Réné and Charlotte:

"If I were in their place, and if I were sure of being king, that is, sure of representing God on earth, I would act like God, I should pardon."

"Madame," cried Réné, snatching the opiate from the hands of Madame de Sauve, "madame, give me back this box; my messenger boy, I see, has made a mistake in it. To-morrow I will send you another."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A NEW CONVERT.

The following day there was to be a hunt in the forest of Saint Germain.

Henry had ordered a small Béarnais horse to be made ready for him; that is, to be saddled and bridled at eight o'clock in the morning. He had intended giving this horse to Madame de Sauve, but he wanted to try it first. At a quarter before eight the horse was ready. On the stroke of eight Henry came down to the court-yard. The horse, proud and fiery in spite of its small size, pricked up its ears and pawed the ground. The weather was cold and a light frost covered the pavement. Henry started to cross the court-yard to the stables where the horse and the groom were waiting, when a Swiss soldier whom he passed standing sentinel at the gate presented arms and said:

"God keep his Majesty the King of Navarre."

At this wish and especially at the tone in which it was uttered the Béarnais started.

He turned and stepped back.

"De Mouy!" he murmured.

"Yes, sire, De Mouy."

"What are you doing here?"

"Looking for you."

"Why are you looking for me?"

"I must speak to your majesty."

"Unfortunately," said the king, approaching him, "do you not know you risk your head?"

"I know it."

"Well?"

"Well, I am here."

Henry turned slightly pale, for he knew that he shared the danger run by this rash young man. He looked anxiously about him, and stepped back a second time, no less quickly than he had done at first. He had seen the Duc d'Alençon at a window.

At once changing his manner Henry took the musket from the hands of De Mouy, standing, as we have said, sentinel, and while apparently measuring it:

"De Mouy," said he, "it is certainly not without some very strong motive that you have come to beard the lion in his den in this way?"

"No, sire, I have waited for you a week; only yesterday I heard that your majesty was to try a horse this morning, and I took my position at the gate of the Louvre."

"But how in this uniform?"

"The captain of the company is a Protestant and is one of my friends."

"Here is your musket; return to your duty of sentinel. We are watched. As I come back I will try to say a word to you, but if I do not speak, do not stop me. Adieu."

De Mouy resumed his measured walk, and Henry advanced towards the house.

"What is that pretty little animal?" asked the Duc d'Alençon from his window.

"A horse I am going to try this morning," replied Henry.

"But that is not a horse for a man."

"Therefore it is intended for a beautiful woman."

"Take care, Henry; you are going to be indiscreet, for we shall see this beautiful woman at the hunt; and if I do not know whose knight you are, I shall at least know whose equerry you are."

"No, my lord, you will not know," said Henry, with his feigned good-humor, "for this beautiful woman cannot go out this morning; she is indisposed."

He sprang into the saddle.

"Ah, bah!" cried d'Alençon, laughing; "poor Madame de Sauve."

"François! François! it is you who are indiscreet."

"What is the matter with the beautiful Charlotte?" went on the Duc d'Alençon.

"Why," replied Henry, spurring his horse to a gallop, and making him describe a graceful curve; "why, I have no idea, — a heaviness in the head, according to what Dariole tells me. A torpor of the whole body; in short, general debility."

"And will this prevent you from joining us?" asked the duke.

"I? Why should it?" asked Henry. "You know that I dote on a hunt, and that nothing could make me miss one."

"But you will miss this one, Henry," said the duke, after he had turned and spoken for an instant with some one unnoticed by Henry, who addressed François from the rear of the room, "for his Majesty tells me that the hunt cannot take place."

"Bah!" said Henry, in the most disappointed tone imaginable. "Why not?"

"Very important letters from Monsieur de Nevers, it seems. There is a council among the King, the queen mother, and my brother the Duc d'Anjou."

"Ah! ah!" said Henry to himself, "could any news have come from Poland?"

Then aloud:

"In that case," he continued, "it is useless for me to run any further risk on this frost. Good-by, brother!"

Pulling up his horse in front of De Mouy:

"My friend," said he, "call one of your comrades to finish your sentinel duty for you. Help the groom ungirth my horse. Put the saddle over your head and carry it to the saddler's; there is some embroidery to be done on it, which there was not time to finish for to-day. You will bring an answer to my apartments."

De Mouy hastened to obey, for the Duc d'Alençon had disappeared from his window, and it was evident that he suspected something.

In fact, scarcely had De Mouy disappeared through the gate before the Duc d'Alençon came in sight. A real Swiss was in De Mouy's place. D'Alençon looked carefully at the new sentinel; then turning to Henry:

"This is not the man you were talking with just now, is it, brother?"

"The other is a young man who belongs to my household and whom I had enter the Swiss guards. I have just given him a commission and he has gone to carry it out."

"Ah!" said the duke, as if this reply sufficed. "And how is Marguerite?"

"I am going to ask her, brother."

"Have you not seen her since yesterday?"

"No. I went to her about eleven o'clock last night, but Gillonne told me that she was tired and had gone to sleep."

"You will not find her in her room. She has gone out."

"Oh!" said Henry. "Very likely. She was to go to the *Convent de l'Annonciade.*"

There was no way of carrying the conversation further, as Henry had seemingly made up his mind simply to answer. The two brothers-in-law therefore departed, the Duc d'Alençon to go for news, he said, the King of Navarre to return to his room.

Henry had been there scarcely five minutes when he heard a knock at the door.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"Sire," replied a voice which Henry recognized as that of De Mouy, "it is the answer from the saddler."

Henry, visibly moved, bade the young man enter and closed the door behind him.

"Is it you, De Mouy?" said he; "I hoped that you would reflect."

"Sire," replied De Mouy, "I have reflected for three months; that is long enough. Now it is time to act." Henry made a gesture of impatience.

"Fear nothing, sire, we are alone, and I will make haste, for time is precious. Your majesty can tell in a word all that the events of the year have lost to the cause of religion. Let us be clear, brief, and frank."

"I am listening, my good De Mouy," replied Henry, seeing that it was impossible for him to elude the explanation.

"Is it true that your majesty has abjured the Protestant religion?"

"It is true," said Henry.

"Yes, but is it with your lips or at heart?"

"One is always grateful to God when he saves our life," replied Henry, turning the question as he had a habit of doing in such cases, "and God has evidently saved me from this cruel danger."

"Sire," resumed De Mouy, "let us admit one thing."

"What?"

"That your abjuring is not a matter of conviction, but of calculation. You have abjured so that the King would let you live, and not because God has saved your life."

"Whatever the cause of my conversion, De Mouy," replied Henry, "I am none the less a Catholic."

"Yes, but shall you always be one? The first chance you have for resuming your freedom of life and of conscience, will you not resume it? Well! this opportunity has presented itself. La Rochelle has revolted, Roussillon and Béarn are merely waiting for one word before acting. In Guyenne every one cries for war. Merely tell me if you were forced into taking this step, and I will answer for the future."

"A gentleman of my birth is not forced, my dear De Mouy. That which I have done, I have done voluntarily."

"But, sire," said the young man, his heart oppressed with this resistance which he had not expected, "you do not remember that in acting thus you abandon and betray us."

Henry was unmoved.

"Yes," went on De Mouy, "yes, you betray us, sire, for several of us, at the risk of our lives, have come to save your honor and your liberty; we are prepared to offer you a throne, sire; do you realize this? not only liberty, but power; a throne of your own choice, for in two months you could choose between Navarre and France."

"De Mouy," said Henry, covering his eyes, which in spite of himself had emitted a flash at the above suggestion, "De Mouy, I am safe, I am a Catholic, I am the husband of Marguerite, I am the brother of King Charles, I am the son-in-law of my good mother Catharine. De Mouy, in assuming these various positions, I have calculated their opportunities and also their obligations."

"But, sire," said De Mouy, "what must one believe? I am told that your marriage is not contracted, that at heart you are free, that the hatred of Catharine"—

"Lies, lies," interrupted the Béarnais hastily. "Yes, you have been shamefully deceived, my friend; this dear Marguerite is indeed my wife, Catharine is really my mother, and King Charles IX. is the lord and master of my life and of my heart."

De Mouy shuddered, and an almost scornful smile passed over his lips.

"In that case, sire," said he dropping his arms dejectedly, and trying to fathom that soul filled with shadows, "this is

the answer I am to take back to my brothers, — I shall tell them that the King of Navarre extends his hand and opens his heart to those who have cut our throats; I shall tell them that he has become the flatterer of the queen mother and the friend of Maurevel."

"My dear De Mouy," said Henry, "the King is coming out of the council chamber, and I must go and find out from him the reasons for our having had to give up so important a thing as a hunt. Adieu; imitate me, my friend, give up politics, return to the King and attend mass."

Henry led or rather pushed into the antechamber the young man, whose amazement was beginning to change into fury.

Scarcely was the door closed before, unable any longer to resist the longing to avenge himself on something in defence of some one, De Mouy twisted his hat between his hands, threw it upon the floor, and stamping on it as a bull would stamp on the cloak of the matador:

"By Heaven!" he cried, "he is a wretched prince, and I have half a mind to kill myself here in order to stain him forever with my blood."

"Hush, Monsieur de Mouy!" said a voice through a half-open door; "hush! some one besides myself might hear you."

De Mouy turned quickly and perceived the Duc d'Alençon enveloped in a cloak, advancing into the corridor with pale face, to make sure that he and De Mouy were entirely alone.

"Monsieur le Duc d'Alençon," cried De Mouy, "I am lost!"

"On the contrary," murmured the prince, "perhaps you have found what you are looking for, and the proof of this is that I do not want you to kill yourself here as you had an idea of doing just now. Believe me, your blood can in all probability be put to better use than to redden the threshold of the King of Navarre."

At these words the duke threw back the door which he had been holding half open.

"This chamber belongs to two of my gentlemen," said the duke. "No one will interrupt us here. We can, therefore, talk freely. Come in, monsieur."

"I, here, monseigneur!" cried the conspirator in amazement. He entered the room, the door of which the Duc d'Alençon closed behind him no less quickly than the King of Navarre had done.

De Mouy entered, furious, exasperated, cursing. But by degrees the cold and steady glance of the young Duc François had the same effect on the Huguenot captain as does the enchanted lake which dissipates drunkenness.

"Monseigneur," said he, "if I understand correctly, your highness wishes to speak to me."

"Yes, Monsieur de Mouy," replied François. "In spite of your disguise I thought I recognized you, and when you presented arms to my brother Henry, I recognized you perfectly. Well, De Mouy, so you are not pleased with the King of Navarre?"

"Monseigneur!"

"Come, come! tell me frankly, unless you distrust me; perhaps I am one of your friends."

"You, monseigneur?"

"Yes, I; so speak."

"I do not know what to say to your highness, monseigneur. The matter I had to discuss with the King of Navarre concerned interests which your highness would not comprehend. Moreover," added De Mouy with a manner which he strove to render indifferent, "they were mere trifles."

"Trifles?" said the duke.

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Trifles, for which you felt you would risk your life by coming back to the Louvre, where you know your head is worth its weight in gold. We are not ignorant of the fact that you, as well as the King of Navarre and the Prince de Condé, are one of the leaders of the Huguenots."

"If you think that, monseigneur, act towards me as the brother of King Charles and the son of Queen Catharine should act."

"Why should you wish me to act in that way, when I have told you that I am a friend of yours? Tell me the truth."

"Monseigneur," said De Mouy, "I swear to you" —

"Do not swear, monseigneur; the reformed church forbids the taking of oaths, and especially of false oaths."

De Mouy frowned.

"I tell you I know all," continued the duke.

De Mouy was still silent.

"You doubt it?" said the prince with affected persistence. "Well, my dear De Mouy, we shall have to be convinced. Come, now, you shall judge if I am wrong. Did you or did you not propose to my brother-in-law Henry, in his room

just now," the duke pointed to the chamber of the Béarnais, "your aid and that of your followers to reinstate him in his kingdom of Navarre?"

De Mouy looked at the duke with a startled gaze.

"A proposition which he refused with terror."

De Mouy was still amazed.

"Did you then invoke your old friendship, the remembrance of a common religion? Did you even hold out to the King of Navarre a very brilliant hope, a hope so brilliant that he was dazzled by it—the hope of winning the crown of France? Come, tell me; am I well informed? Is that what you came to propose to the Béarnais?"

"Monseigneur!" cried De Mouy, "this is so true, that I now wonder if I should not tell your royal highness that you have lied! to arouse in this chamber a combat without mercy, and thus to make sure of the extinction of this terrible secret by the death of both of us."

"Gently, my brave De Mouy, gently!" said the Duc d'Alençon without changing countenance, or without taking the slightest notice of this terrible threat.

"The secret will die better with us if we both live than if one of us were to die. Listen to me, and stop pulling at the handle of your sword. For the third time I say that you are with a friend. Now tell me, did not the King of Navarre refuse everything you offered him?"

"Yes, monseigneur, and I admit it, because my avowal can compromise only myself."

"On leaving his room did you not stamp on your hat, and cry out that he was a cowardly prince, and unworthy of being your leader?"

"That is true, monseigneur, I said that."

"Ah! you did? you admit it at last?"

"Yes."

"And this is still your opinion?"

"More than ever, monseigneur."

"Well, am I, Monsieur de Mouy, I, the third son of Henry II., I, a son of France, am I a good enough gentleman to command your soldiers? Come, now; do you think me loyal enough for you to trust my word?"

"You, monseigneur! you, the leader of the Huguenots!"

"Why not? This is an epoch of conversions, you know. Henry has turned Catholic; I can turn Protestant."

"Yes, no doubt, monseigneur; so I am waiting for you to explain to me" —

"Nothing is easier; and in two words I can tell you the policy of every one. My brother Charles kills the Huguenots in order to reign more freely. My brother of Anjou lets them be killed because he is to succeed my brother Charles, and because, as you know, my brother Charles is often ill. But with me it is entirely different. I shall never reign — at least in France — as long as I have two elder brothers. The hatred of my mother and of my two brothers more than the law of nature keeps me from the throne. I have no claim to any family affection, any glory, or any kingdom. Yet I have a heart as great as my elder brother's. Well, De Mouy, I want to look about and with my sword cut a kingdom out of this France they cover with blood Now this is what I want, De Mouy, listen: I want to be King of Navarre, not by birth but by election. And note well that you have no objection to this system. I am not a usurper, since my brother refuses your offers, and buries himself in his torpor, and pretends aloud that this kingdom of Navarre is only a myth. With Henry of Béarn you have nothing. With me, you have a sword and a name, François d'Alençon, son of France, protector of all his companions or all his accomplices, as you are pleased to call them. Well, what do you say to this offer, Monsieur de Mouy?"

"I say that it dazzles me, monseigneur."

"De Mouy, De Mouy, we shall have many obstacles to overcome. Do not, therefore, from the first be so exacting and so obstinate towards the son of a king and the brother of a king who comes to you."

"Monseigneur, the matter would be already settled if my opinion were the only one to be considered, but we have a council, and brilliant as the offer may be, perhaps even on that very account the leaders of the party will not consent to the plan unconditionally."

"That is another thing, and your answer comes from an honest heart and a prudent mind. From the way I have just acted, De Mouy, you must have recognized my honesty. Treat me, therefore, on your part as a man who is esteemed, not as a man who is flattered. De Mouy, have I any chance?"

"On my word, monseigneur, since your highness wants

me to give my opinion, your highness has every chance, since the King of Navarre has refused the offer I have just made him. But I tell you again, monseigneur, I shall have to confer with our leaders."

"Do so, monsieur," replied D'Alençon. "But when shall I have an answer?"

De Mouy looked at the prince in silence. Then apparently coming to a decision:

"Monseigneur," said he, "give me your hand. I must have the hand of a son of France touch mine to make sure that I shall not be betrayed."

The duke not only extended his hand towards De Mouy, but grasped De Mouy's and pressed it.

"Now, monseigneur, I am satisfied," said the young Huguenot. "If we were betrayed I should say that you had nothing to do with it; otherwise, monseigneur, however slightly you might be concerned in the treason, you would be dishonored."

"Why do you say that to me, De Mouy, before telling me that you will bring me the answer from your leaders?"

"Because, monseigneur, asking me when you would have your answer was the same as asking me where are the leaders, and because if I said to you, 'This evening,' you would know that the chiefs were hiding in Paris." As he uttered these words, with a gesture of mistrust, De Mouy fixed his piercing glance on the false vacillating eyes of the young man.

"Well, well," said the duke, "you still have doubts, Monsieur de Mouy. But I cannot expect entire confidence from you at first. You will understand me better later. We shall be bound by common interests which will rid you of all suspicion. You say this evening, then, Monsieur de Mouy?"

"Yes, monseigneur, for time presses. Until this evening. But where shall I see you, if you please?"

"At the Louvre, here in this room; does that suit you?"

"Is this occupied?" said De Mouy, glancing at the two beds opposite each other.

"By two of my gentlemen, yes."

"Monseigneur, it seems to me imprudent to return to the Louvre."

"Why so?"

"Because if you have recognized me, others also may have as good eyes as your highness, and may recognize me. How-

ever, I will return to the Louvre if you will grant me what I am about to ask of you."

"What is that?"

"A passport."

"A passport from me found on you would ruin me and would not save you. I can do nothing for you unless in the eyes of the world we are strangers to each other; the slightest relation between us, noticed by my mother or my brother, would cost me my life. You were therefore protected by my interest for myself from the moment I compromised myself with the others, as I am now compromising myself with you. Free in my sphere of action, strong if I am unknown, so long as I myself remain impenetrable, I will guarantee you everything. Do not forget this. Make a fresh appeal to your courage, therefore. Try on my word of honor what you tried without the word of honor of my brother. Come this evening to the Louvre."

"But how do you wish me to come? I can not venture in these rooms in my present uniform — it is for the vestibules and the courts. My own is still more dangerous, since everyone knows me here, and since it in no way disguises me."

"Therefore I will look — wait — I think that — yes, here it is."

The duke had looked around him, and his eyes stopped at La Mole's clothes, thrown temporarily on the bed; that is, on the magnificent cherry-colored cloak embroidered in gold, of which we have already spoken; on a cap ornamented with a white plume surrounded by a rope of gold and silver marguerites, and finally on a pearl-gray satin and gold doublet.

"Do you see this cloak, this plume, and this doublet?" said the duke; "they belong to Monsieur de la Mole, one of my gentlemen, a fop of the highest type. The cloak was the rage at court, and when he wore it, Monsieur de la Mole was recognized a hundred feet away. I will give you the address of the tailor who made it for him. By paying him double what it is worth, you will have one exactly like it by this evening. You will remember the name of Monsieur de la Mole, will you not?"

Scarcely had the Duc d'Alençon finished making the suggestion, when a step was heard approaching in the corridor, and a key was turned in the lock.

"Who is that?" cried the duke, rushing to the door and drawing the bolt.

"By Heaven!" replied a voice from outside; "I find that a strange question. Who are you yourself? This is pleasant! I return to my own room, and am asked who I am!"

"Is it you, Monsieur de la Mole?"

"Yes, it is I, without a doubt. But who are you?"

While La Mole was expressing his surprise at finding his room occupied, and while he was trying to discover its new occupant, the Duc d'Alençon turned quickly, one hand on the lock, the other on the key.

"Do you know Monsieur de la Mole?" he asked of De Mouy.

"No, monseigneur."

"Does he know you?"

"I think not."

"In that case it will be all right. Appear to be looking out of the window."

De Mouy obeyed in silence, for La Mole was beginning to grow impatient, and was knocking on the door with all his might.

The Duc d'Alençon threw a last glance towards De Mouy, and seeing that his back was turned, he opened the door.

"Monseigneur le Duc!" cried La Mole, stepping back in surprise. "Oh, pardon, pardon, monseigneur!"

"It is nothing, monsieur; I needed your room to receive a visitor."

"Certainly, monseigneur, certainly. But allow me, I beg you, to take my cloak and hat from the bed, for I lost both to-night on the quay of the Grève, where I was attacked by robbers."

"In fact, monsieur," said the prince, smiling, himself handing to La Mole the articles asked for, "you are very poorly accommodated here. You have had an encounter with some very obstinate fellows, apparently!"

The duke handed to La Mole the cloak and the hat. The young man bowed and withdrew to the antechamber to change his clothes, paying no attention to what the duke was doing in his room; for it was an ordinary occurrence at the Louvre for the rooms of the gentlemen to be used as reception-rooms by the prince to whom the latter were attached.

De Mouy then approached the duke, and both listened for La Mole to finish and go out; but when the latter had changed his clothes, he himself saved them all further trouble by drawing near to the door.

"Pardon me, monseigneur," said he, "but did your highness meet the Count de Coconnas on your way?"

"No, count, and yet he was at service this morning."

"In that case they will assassinate me," said La Mole to himself as he went away.

The duke heard the noise of his retreating steps; then opening the door and drawing De Mouy after him:

"Watch him going away," said he, "and try to copy his inimitable walk."

"I will do my best," replied De Mouy. "Unfortunately I am not a lady's man, but a soldier."

"At all events I shall expect you in this corridor before midnight. If the chamber of my gentlemen is free, I will receive you there; if not, we will find another."

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Until this evening then, before midnight."

"Until this evening, before midnight."

"Ah! by the way, De Mouy, swing your right arm a good deal as you walk. This is a peculiar trick of Monsieur de la Mole's."

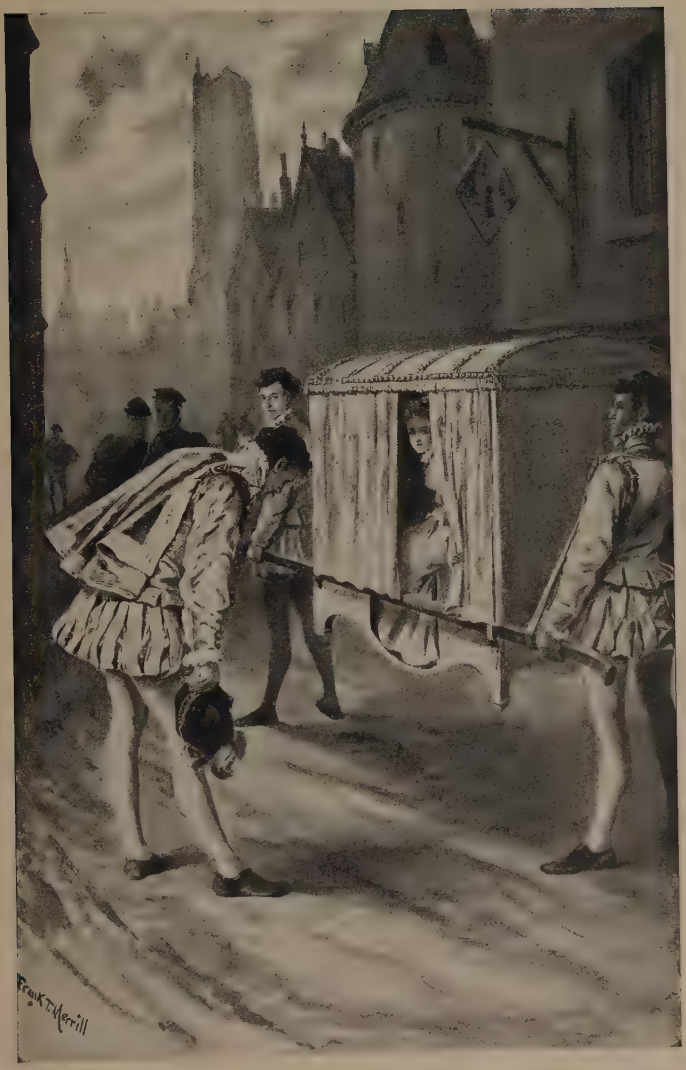
CHAPTER XXIV.

THE RUE TIZON AND THE RUE CLOCHE PERCÉE.

La Mole hurriedly left the Louvre, and set out to search Paris for poor Coconnas.

His first move was to repair to the Rue de l'Arbre Sec and to enter Maître La Hurière's, for La Mole remembered that he had often repeated to the Piedmontese a certain Latin motto which was meant to prove that Love, Bacchus, and Ceres are gods absolutely necessary to us, and he hoped that Coconnas, to follow up the Roman aphorism, had gone to the *Belle Étoile* after a night which must have been as full for his friend as it had been for himself.

La Mole found nothing at La Hurière's except the reminder of the assumed obligation. A breakfast which was offered with good grace was eagerly accepted by our gentleman, in spite of his anxiety. His stomach calmed in default of his mind, La Mole resumed his walk, ascending the bank of the Seine like a husband searching for his drowned wife. On reach-



"MONSIEUR DE LA MOLE!" EXCLAIMED A SWEET VOICE FROM THE LITTER

ing the quay of the Grève, he recognized the place where, as he had said to Monsieur d'Alençon, he had been stopped during his nocturnal tramp three or four hours before. This was no unusual thing in Paris, older by a hundred years than that in which Boileau was awakened at the sound of a ball piercing his window shutter. A bit of the plume from his hat remained on the battle-field. The sentiment of possession is innate in man. La Mole had ten plumes each more beautiful than the last, and yet he stopped to pick up that one, or, rather, the sole fragment of what remained of it, and was contemplating it with a pitiful air when he heard the sound of heavy steps approaching, and rough voices ordering him to stand aside. La Mole raised his head and perceived a litter preceded by two pages and accompanied by an outrider. La Mole thought he recognized the litter, and quickly stepped aside.

The young man was not mistaken.

"Monsieur de la Mole!" exclaimed a sweet voice from the litter, while a hand as white and as smooth as satin drew back the curtains.

"Yes, madame, in person," replied La Mole bowing.

"Monsieur de la Mole with a plume in his hand," continued the lady in the litter. "Are you in love, my dear monsieur, and are you recovering lost traces?"

"Yes, madame," replied La Mole, "I am in love, and very much so. But just now these are my own traces that I have found, although they are not those for which I am searching. But will your majesty permit me to inquire after your health?"

"It is excellent, monsieur; it seems to me that I have never been better. This probably comes from the fact of my having spent the night in retreat."

"Ah! in retreat!" said La Mole, looking at Marguerite strangely.

"Well, yes; what is there surprising in that?"

"May I, without indiscretion, ask you in what convent?"

"Certainly, monsieur, I make no mystery of it; in the convent of the *Annonciade*. But what are you doing here with this startled air?"

"Madame, I too passed the night in retreat, and in the vicinity of the same convent. This morning I am looking for my friend who has disappeared, and in seeking him I came upon this plume."

"Whom does it belong to? Really, you frighten me about him; the place is a bad one."

"Your majesty may be reassured; the plume belongs to me. I lost it here about half-past five, as I was escaping from the hands of four bandits who tried with all their might to murder me, or at least I think they did."

Marguerite repressed a quick gesture of terror.

"Oh! tell me about it!" said she.

"Nothing is easier, madame. It was, as I have had the honor to tell your majesty, about five o'clock in the morning."

"And you were already out at five o'clock in the morning?" interrupted Marguerite.

"Your majesty will excuse me," said La Mole, "I had not yet returned."

"Ah! Monsieur de la Mole! you returned at five o'clock in the morning!" said Marguerite with a smile which was fatal for every one, and which La Mole was unfortunate enough to find adorable; "you returned so late, you merited this punishment!"

"Therefore I do not complain, madame," said La Mole, bowing respectfully, "and I should have been cut to pieces had I not considered myself a hundred times more fortunate than I deserve to be. But I was returning late, or early, as your majesty pleases, from that fortunate house in which I had spent the night in retreat, when four cut-throats rushed from the Rue de la Mortellerie and pursued me with indescribably long knives. It is grotesque, is it not, madame? but it is true — I had to run away, for I had forgotten my sword."

"Oh! I understand," said Marguerite, with an admirably naïve manner, "and you have come back to find your sword?"

La Mole looked at Marguerite as though a suspicion flashed through his mind.

"Madame, I would return to some place and very willingly too, since my sword is an excellent blade, but I do not know where the house is."

"What, monsieur?" exclaimed Marguerite. "You do not know where the house is in which you passed the night?"

"No, madame, and may Satan exterminate me if I have any idea!"

"Well this is strange! your story, then, is a romance?"

"A true romance, as you say, madame."

"Tell it to me."

"It is somewhat long."

"Never mind, I have time."

"And, above all, it is improbable."

"Never mind, no one could be more credulous than I."

"Does your majesty command me?"

"Why, yes; if necessary."

"In that case I obey. Last evening, having left two adorable women with whom we had spent the evening on the Saint Michel bridge, we took supper at Maître La Hurière's."

"In the first place," said Marguerite, perfectly naturally, "who is Maître La Hurière?"

"Maître La Hurière, madame," said La Mole, again glancing at Marguerite with the suspicion he had already felt, "Maître La Hurière is the host of the inn of the *Belle Étoile* in the Rue de l'Arbre Sec."

"Yes, I can see it from here. You were supping, then, at Maître La Hurière's with your friend Coconnas, no doubt?"

"Yes, madame, with my friend Coconnas, when a man entered and handed us each a note."

"Were they alike?" asked Marguerite.

"Exactly alike. They contained only a single line:

"'*You are awaited in the Rue Saint Antoine, opposite the Rue Saint Jouy.*'"

"And had the note no signature?" asked Marguerite.

"No; only three words — three charming words which three times promised the same thing, that is to say, a threefold happiness."

"And what were these three words?"

"*Eros, Cupido, Amor.*"

"In short, three sweet words; and did they fulfil what they promised?"

"Oh! more, madame, a hundred times more!" cried La Mole with enthusiasm.

"Continue. I am curious to know who was waiting for you in the Rue Saint Antoine, opposite the Rue de Jouy."

"Two duennas, each with a handkerchief in her hand. They said we must let them bandage our eyes. Your majesty may imagine that it was not a difficult thing to have done. We bravely extended our necks. My guide turned me to the left, my friend's guide turned him to the right, and we were separated."

"And then?" continued Marguerite, who seemed determined to carry out the investigation to the end.

"I do not know," said La Mole, "where his guide led my friend. To hell, perhaps. As to myself, all I know is that mine led me to a place I consider paradise."

"And whence, no doubt, your too great curiosity drove you?"

"Exactly, madame; you have the gift of divination. I waited, impatiently, for daylight, that I might see where I was, when at half-past four the same duenna returned, again bandaged my eyes, made me promise not to try to raise my bandage, led me outside, accompanied me for a hundred feet, made me again swear not to remove my bandage until I had counted fifty more. I counted fifty, and found myself in the Rue Saint Antoine, opposite the Rue de Jouy."

"And then" —

"Then, madame, I returned so happy that I paid no attention to the four wretches, from whose clutches I had such difficulty in escaping. Now, madame," continued La Mole, "in finding a piece of my plume here, my heart trembled with joy, and I picked it up, promising myself to keep it as a souvenir of this glad night. But in the midst of my happiness, one thing troubles me; that is, what may have become of my companion."

"Has he not returned to the Louvre?"

"Alas! no, madame! I have searched everywhere, in the *Étoile d'Or*, on the tennis courts, and in many other respectable places; but no Annibal, and no Coconnas" —

As La Mole uttered these words he accompanied them with a gesture of hopelessness, extended his arms and opened his cloak, underneath which at various points his doublet was seen, the lining of which showed through the rents like so many elegant slashes.

"Why, you were riddled through and through!" exclaimed Marguerite.

"Riddled is the word!" said La Mole, who was not sorry to turn to his account the danger he had run. "See, madame, see!"

"Why did you not change your doublet at the Louvre, since you returned there?" asked the queen.

"Ah!" said La Mole, "because some one was in my room."

"Some one in your room?" said Marguerite, whose eyes expressed the greatest astonishment; "who was in your room?"

"His highness."

"Hush!" interrupted Marguerite.

The young man obeyed.

"*Qui ad lecticam meam stant?*" she asked La Mole.

"*Duo pueri et unus eques.*"

"*Optime, barbari!*" said she. "*Dic, Moles, quem inveneris in biculo tuo?*"

"*Franciscum ducem.*"

"*Agentem?*"

"*Nescio quid.*"

"*Quocum?*"

"*Cum ignoto.*"[1]

"That is strange," said Marguerite. "So you were unable to find Coconnas?" she continued, without evidently thinking of what she was saying.

"So, madame, as I have had the honor of telling you, I am really dying of anxiety."

"Well," said Marguerite, sighing, "I do not wish to detain you longer in your search for him; I do not know why I think so, but he will find himself! Never mind, however, go, in spite of this."

The queen laid a finger on her lips. But as beautiful Marguerite had confided no secret, had made no avowal to La Mole, the young man understood that this charming gesture, meaning only to impose silence on him, must have another significance.

The procession resumed its march, and La Mole, intent on following out his investigation, continued to ascend the quay as far as the Rue Long Pont which led him to the Rue Saint Antoine.

Opposite the Rue Jouy he stopped. It was there that the previous evening the two duennas had bandaged his eyes and those of Coconnas. He had turned to the left, then he had counted twenty steps. He repeated this and found himself opposite a house, or rather a wall, behind which rose a house; in this wall was a door with a shed over it ornamented with large nails and loop-holes.

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[1] "Who are standing by my litter?"
"Two pages and an outrider."
"Good! They are barbarians! Tell me, La Mole, whom did you find in your room?"
"Duke François."
"Doing what?"
"I do not know."
"With whom?"
"With a stranger."

The house was in the Rue Cloche Percée, a small narrow street beginning in the Rue Saint Antoine and ending in the Rue Roi de Sicile.

"By Heaven!" cried La Mole, "it was here — I would swear to it — in extending my hand, as I came out, I felt the nails in the door, then I descended two steps. The man who ran by crying 'Help!' who was killed in the Rue Roi de Sicile, passed just as I reached the first. Let us see, now."

La Mole went to the door and knocked. The door opened and a mustached janitor appeared.

"*Was ist das?*" (Who is that?) asked the janitor.

"Ah! ah!" said La Mole, "we are Swiss, apparently. "My friend," he continued, assuming the most charming manner, "I want my sword which I left in this house in which I spent the night."

"*Ich verstehe nicht,*" (I do not understand,) replied the janitor.

"My sword," went on La Mole.

"*Ich verstehe nicht,*" repeated the janitor.

"— which I left — my sword which I left" —

"*Ich verstehe nicht.*"

"— in this house, in which I spent the night."

"*Gehe zum Teufel!*" (Go to the devil!) And he slammed the door in La Mole's face.

"By Heaven!" cried La Mole, "if I had this sword I have just asked for, I would gladly put it through that fellow's body. But I have not, and this must wait for another day."

Thereupon La Mole continued his way to the Rue Roi de Sicile, took about fifty steps to the right, then to the left again, and came to the Rue Tizon, a little street running parallel with the Rue Cloche Percée, and like it in every way. More than this, scarcely had he gone thirty steps before he came upon the door with the large nails, with its shed and loop-holes, the two steps and the wall. One would have said that the Rue Cloche Percée had returned to see him pass by.

La Mole then reflected that he might have mistaken his right for his left, and he knocked at this door, to make the same demand he had made at the other. But this time he knocked in vain. The door was not opened.

Two or three times La Mole made the same trip, which naturally led him to the idea that the house had two entrances, one on the Rue Cloche Percée, the other on the Rue Tizon.

But this conclusion, logical as it was, did not bring him back his sword, and did not tell him where his friend was. For an instant he conceived the idea of buying another sword and cutting to pieces the wretched janitor who so persistently refused to speak anything but German, but he thought this porter belonged to Marguerite, and that if Marguerite had chosen thus, it was because she had her reasons, and that it might be disagreeable for her to be deprived of him.

Now La Mole would not have done anything disagreeable to Marguerite for anything in the world.

Fearing to yield to this temptation he returned about two o'clock in the afternoon to the Louvre.

As his room was not occupied this time he could enter it. The matter was urgent enough as far as his doublet was concerned, which, as the queen had already remarked to him, was considerably torn.

He therefore at once approached his bed to substitute the beautiful pearl-gray doublet for the one he wore, when to his great surprise the first thing he perceived near the pearl-gray doublet was the famous sword which he had left in the Rue Cloche Percée.

La Mole took it and turned it over and over.

It was really his.

"Ah! ah!" said he, "is there some magic under all this?" Then with a sigh, "Ah! if poor Coconnas could be found like my sword!"

Two or three hours after La Mole had ceased his circular tramp around the small double house, the door on the Rue Tizon had opened. It was about five o'clock in the evening, consequently night had closed in.

A woman wrapped in a long cloak trimmed with fur, accompanied by an attendant, came out of the door which was held open by a duenna of forty, and hurrying rapidly along to the Rue Roi de Sicile, knocked at a small door of the Hôtel Argenson, which opened for her; she then left by the main entrance of the same hôtel which opened on to the Vieille Rue du Temple, went toward a small postern in the Hôtel de Guise, unlocked it with a key which she carried in her pocket, and disappeared.

Half an hour later a young man with bandaged eyes left by the same door of the small house, guided by a woman who led him to the corner of the Rue Geoffroy Lasnier and La

Mortellerie. There she asked him to count fifty steps and then remove his bandage.

The young man carefully obeyed the order, and when he had counted fifty, removed the handkerchief from his eyes.

"By Heaven!" cried he, looking around. "I'll be hanged if I know where I am! Six o'clock!" he cried, as the clock of Nôtre-Dame struck, "and poor La Mole, what can have become of him? Let us run to the Louvre, perhaps they may have news of him there."

Coconnas hurriedly descended the Rue La Mortellerie, and reached the gates of the Louvre in less time than it would have taken an ordinary horse. As he went he jostled and knocked down the moving hedge of brave bourgeois who were walking peacefully about the shops of the Place de Baudoyer, and entered the palace.

There he questioned the Swiss and the sentinel. The former thought they had seen Monsieur de la Mole enter that morning, but had not seen him go out.

The sentinel had been there only an hour and a half and had seen nothing.

He ran to his room and hastily threw open the door; but he found only the torn doublet of La Mole on the bed, which increased his fears still more.

Then he thought of La Hurière and hastened to the worthy inn of the *Belle Étoile.* La Hurière had seen La Mole; La Mole had breakfasted there. Coconnas was thus wholly reassured, and as he was very hungry he ordered supper.

Conconnas was in the two moods necessary for a good supper — his mind was relieved and his stomach was empty; therefore he supped so well that the meal lasted till eight o'clock. Then strengthened by two bottles of light wine from Anjou, of which he was very fond and which he tossed off with a sensual enjoyment shown by winks of his eyes and repeated smacking of his lips, he set out again in his search for La Mole, accompanying it through the crowd by kicks and knocks of his feet in proportion to the increasing friendship inspired in him by the comfort which always follows a good meal.

That lasted one hour, during which time Coconnas searched every street in the vicinity of the Quay of the Grève, the Port au Charbon, the Rue Saint Antoine, and the Rues Tizon and Cloche Percée, to which he thought his friend might have re-

turned. Finally he bethought himself that there was a place through which he had to pass, the gate of the Louvre, and he resolved to wait at this gate until his return.

He was not more than a hundred steps from the Louvre, and had just put on her feet a woman whose husband he had already overturned on the Place Saint Germain l'Auxerrois, when in the distance he perceived before him in the doubtful light of a great lantern near the drawbridge of the Louvre the cherry-colored velvet cloak and the white plume of his friend, who like a shadow was disappearing under the gate and returning the sentinel's greeting.

The famous cherry-colored cloak was so well known to every one that he could not be mistaken in it.

"Well! by Heaven!" cried Coconnas; "it is really he this time, and he is returning. Well! well! La Mole, my friend! Plague it! Yet I have a good voice. How does it happen that he does not hear me? Fortunately I have as good legs as I have voice, so I will join him."

In this hope Coconnas set out as fast as he could, and reached the Louvre in an instant, but, fast as he was, just as he stepped into the court the red cloak, which seemed in haste also, disappeared in the vestibule.

"Hi there! La Mole!" cried Coconnas, still hastening. "Wait for me. It is I, Coconnas. What in the devil are you hurrying so for? Are you running away?"

In fact the red cloak, as though it had wings, scaled the stairs rather than mounted them.

"Ah! you will not hear me!" cried Coconnas. "I am angry with you! Are you sorry? Well, the devil! I can run no further." It was from the foot of the staircase that Coconnas hurled this final apostrophe to the fugitive whom he gave up following with his feet, but whom he still followed with his eyes through the screw of the stairway, and who had reached Marguerite's chamber. Suddenly a woman came out of this room and took the arm of the man Coconnas was following.

"Oh! oh!" said Coconnas, "that looked very much like Queen Marguerite. He was expected. In that case it is different. I understand why he did not answer me."

Crouching down by the banister he looked through the opening of the stairway. Then after a few words in a low voice he saw the red cloak follow the queen to her apartments.

"Good! good!" said Coconnas, "that is it. I was not mis-

taken. There are moments when the presence of our best friend is necessary to us, and dear La Mole has one of those moments."

And Coconnas ascending the stairs softly sat down on a velvet bench which ornamented the landing place, and said to himself:

"Very well, instead of joining him I will wait — yes; but," he added, "I think as he is with the Queen of Navarre I may have to wait long — it is cold, by Heaven! Well! well! I can wait just as well in my room. He will have to come there sometime."

Scarcely had he finished speaking, and started to carry out his resolution, when a quick light step sounded above him, accompanied by a snatch of song so familiar that Coconnas at once turned his head in the direction of the step and the song. It was La Mole descending from the upper story, where his room was. When he perceived Coconnas, he began to descend the stairs four steps at a time, and this done he threw himself into his arms.

"Oh, Heavens! is it you?" said Coconnas. "How the devil did you get out?"

"By the Rue Cloche Percée, by Heavens!"

"No, I do not mean that house."

"What then?"

"The queen's apartment."

"The queen's apartment?"

"The Queen of Navarre."

"I have not been there."

"Come now!"

"My dear Annibal," said La Mole, "you are out of your head. I have come from my room where I have been waiting for you for two hours."

"You have come from your room?"

"Yes."

"Was it not you I followed from the Place du Louvre?"

"When?"

"Just now."

"No."

"It was not you who disappeared under the gate ten minutes ago?"

"No."

"It was not you who just ascended the stairs as if you were pursued by a legion of devils?"

"No."

"By Heaven!" cried Coconnas, "the wine of the *Belle Étoile* is not poor enough to have so completely turned my head. I tell you that I have just seen your cherry-colored cloak and your white plume under the gate of the Louvre, that I followed both to the foot of the stairway, and that your cloak, your plume, everything, to your swinging arm, was expected here by a lady whom I greatly suspect to be the Queen of Navarre, and who led you through that door, which, unless I am mistaken, is that of the beautiful Marguerite."

"By Heaven!" cried La Mole, growing pale, "could there be treason?"

"Very good!" said Coconnas, "swear as much as you please, but do not tell me I am mistaken."

La Mole hesitated an instant, pressing his head between his hands, deterred by respect and jealousy. His jealousy conquered him, however, and he hastened to the door, at which he knocked with all his might. This caused a somewhat unusual hubbub considering the dignity of the place in which it occurred.

"We shall be arrested," said Coconnas, "but no matter, it is very funny. Tell me, La Mole, are there ghosts in the Louvre?"

"I know nothing about it," said the young man as pale as the plume which shaded his brow; "but I have always wanted to see one, and as the opportunity presents itself I shall do my best to come face to face with this one."

"I shall not prevent you," said Coconnas, "only knock a little less fiercely if you do not wish to frighten it away."

La Mole, exasperated as he was, felt the justice of the remark, and began to knock more gently.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE CHERRY-COLORED CLOAK.

Coconnas was not mistaken. The lady who had stopped the cavalier of the cherry-colored cloak was indeed the Queen of Navarre. As to the cavalier, our reader has already guessed, I presume, that he was no other than brave De Mouy. Upon recognizing the Queen of Navarre the young Huguenot realized that there was some mistake; but he dared not speak, fearing a cry from Marguerite would betray him. He preferred to let himself be led to her apartments, and when once there to say to his beautiful guide:

"Silence for silence, madame."

Marguerite had gently pressed the arm of him whom in the semi-darkness she had mistaken for La Mole, and leaning toward him whispered in Latin:

"*Sola sum; introito, carissime.*"[1]

De Mouy without answering let her lead him along; but scarcely was the door closed behind him and he found himself in the antechamber, which was better lighted than the stairway, before Marguerite saw that he was not La Mole.

Thereupon the cry which the cautious Huguenot had feared escaped Marguerite; but fortunately there was no further danger from it.

"Monsieur de Mouy!" cried she, stepping back.

"In person, madame, and I beg your majesty to leave me free to continue my way without mentioning my presence in the Louvre to any one."

"Oh! Monsieur de Mouy!" reiterated Marguerite, "I was mistaken, then!"

"Yes," said De Mouy, "I understand. Your majesty mistook me for the King of Navarre. I am the same height, I wear the same white plume, and many, no doubt in order to flatter me, say I have the same gait."

Marguerite looked closely at De Mouy.

"Do you understand Latin, Monsieur de Mouy?" she asked.

"I used to know it," replied the young man, "but I have forgotten it."

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[1] "I am alone; enter, my dear."

Marguerite smiled.

"Monsieur de Mouy," said she, "you may rely on my discretion. But as I think I know the name of the one you are seeking in the Louvre, I will offer my services to guide you directly to him."

"Excuse me, madame," said De Mouy, "I think you are mistaken, and that you are completely ignorant of" —

"What!" exclaimed Marguerite, "are you not looking for the King of Navarre?"

"Alas, madame," said De Mouy, "I regret to have to beg you especially to conceal my presence in the Louvre from your husband, his majesty the king."

"Listen, Monsieur de Mouy," said Marguerite in surprise, "I have considered you until now one of the strongest leaders of the Huguenot party, and one of the most faithful partisans of the king my husband. Am I mistaken?"

"No, madame, for this very morning I was all that you say."

"And what has changed you since this morning?"

"Madame," said De Mouy, bowing, "kindly excuse me from answering, and do me the favor to accept my homage."

De Mouy, respectful but firm, started towards the door.

Marguerite stopped him.

"But, monsieur," said she, "if I were to ask you for a word of explanation, my word is good, it seems to me?"

"Madame," replied De Mouy, "I am obliged to keep silent, and this duty must be very imperative for me not to have answered your majesty."

"But, monsieur" —

"Your majesty may ruin me, madame, but you cannot ask me to betray my new friends."

"But the old ones, monsieur, have they too not some rights?"

"Those who have remained true, yes; those who not only have abandoned us, but themselves as well, no."

Marguerite, thoughtful and anxious, would no doubt have answered by a new question, had not Gillonne suddenly entered the apartment.

"The King of Navarre!" she cried.

"How is he coming?"

"By the secret corridor."

"Take monsieur out by the other."

"Impossible, madame. Listen."

"Some one is knocking?"

"Yes, at the door to which you wish me to take monsieur."

"Who is knocking?"

"I do not know."

"Go and see, and come back and tell me."

"Madame," said De Mouy, "might I venture to remark to your majesty that if the King of Navarre sees me at this hour and in this costume in the Louvre, I am lost?"

Marguerite seized De Mouy and pushed him towards the famous cabinet.

"Step in here, monsieur," said she; "you will be as safe and as well protected as if you were in your own house; I give you my word of honor."

De Mouy entered hastily. Scarcely was the door closed when Henry appeared.

This time Marguerite had no anxiety to hide — she was merely gloomy, and love was far from her thoughts.

As to Henry, he entered with that mistrust which in the most dangerous moments caused him to notice the smallest details; whatever the circumstances, Henry was an acute observer. Therefore he at once saw the cloud on Marguerite's brow.

"You are busy, madame?" said he.

"I? Why, yes, sire, I was dreaming."

"You do well, madame. Dreaming is becoming to you. I too was dreaming; but contrary to you who seek solitude, I have come on purpose to share my dreams with you." Marguerite gave the king a gesture of welcome, and indicating an armchair to him, seated herself on a chair of sculptured ebony, as delicate and as strong as steel. There was an instant's silence; then Henry broke it.

"I remembered, madame," said he, "that my dreams as to the future corresponded with yours in so far as although separated as husband and wife, nevertheless we both desire to unite our fortune."

"That is true, sire."

"I think I understood you to say also that in all the plans I might make toward our mutual rising, I would find in you not only a faithful but an active ally."

"Yes, sire, and I ask only one thing, that in beginning the work as soon as possible, you will give me the opportunity to begin also."

"I am glad to find you of this mind, madame, and I trust that you have not for one instant doubted that I would lose sight of the plan I resolved to carry out the very day when, thanks to your brave intervention, I was almost sure of being safe."

"Monsieur, I think that your carelessness is nothing but a mask, and I have faith not only in the predictions by the astrologers, but in your good genius as well."

"What should you say, madame, if someone were to upset our plans and threaten to reduce us to an ordinary position?"

"I should say that I was ready to fight with you, either openly or in secret, against this someone, whoever he might be."

"Madame," continued Henry, "it is possible for you, is it not, to gain immediate admission into the room of your brother, Monsieur d'Alençon? You are in his confidence and he is very friendly to you; might I venture to beg you to find out if he is at present holding a secret conference with someone?"

Marguerite gave a start.

"With whom, monsieur?" she asked.

"With De Mouy."

"Why?" asked Marguerite, repressing her emotion.

"Because if such is the case, madame, farewell to all our projects, or to all mine, at least."

"Sire, speak softly," said Marguerite, making a sign with her eyes and lips, and pointing to the cabinet.

"Oh! oh!" said Henry, "still someone? Indeed, that cabinet is so often occupied that it makes your room uninhabitable."

Marguerite smiled.

"Is it still Monsieur de la Mole?" asked Henry.

"No, sire, it is Monsieur de Mouy."

"He?" cried Henry with surprise mingled with joy. "He is not with the Duc d'Alençon, then? Oh! have him come in, that I may talk to him."

Marguerite stepped to the cabinet, opened it, and taking De Mouy by the hand led him without preamble to the King of Navarre.

"Ah! madame," said the young Huguenot, in a tone of reproach more sad than bitter, "you have betrayed me in spite of your promise; that is wrong. What should you do if I were to avenge myself by saying" —

"You will not avenge yourself, De Mouy," interrupted Henry, pressing the young man's hand, "or at least you will listen to me first. Madame," continued Henry, turning to the queen, "be kind enough, I beg you, to see that no one overhears us."

Scarcely had Henry uttered these words when Gillonne entered, frightened, and whispered a few words to Marguerite, which caused the latter to spring from her seat. While she hastened to the antechamber with Gillonne, Henry, without troubling himself as to why she had left the room, examined the bed, the side of it, as well as the draperies, and sounded the wall with his fingers. As to Monsieur de Mouy, frightened at all these preparations, he first of all made sure that his sword was out of its sheath.

Leaving her sleeping-room, Marguerite hastened to the antechamber and came face to face with La Mole, who in spite of all the protests of Gillonne had forced his way into Marguerite's room.

Coconnas was behind him, ready to urge him forward or sustain a retreat.

"Ah! it is you, Monsieur la Mole!" cried the queen; "but what is the matter, and why are you so pale and trembling?"

"Madame," said Gillonne, "Monsieur de la Mole knocked at the door so that, in spite of your majesty's orders, I was forced to open it."

"What is the meaning of this?" said the queen, severely; "is this true, Monsieur de la Mole?"

"Madame, I wanted to warn your majesty that a stranger, a robber perhaps, had gained admittance to your rooms with my cloak and my hat."

"You are mad, monsieur," said Marguerite, "for I see your cloak on your shoulders, and, God forgive me, I think I see your hat on your head, even though you are speaking to a queen."

"Oh! pardon me, madame, pardon me!" cried La Mole, quickly uncovering; "but God is my witness, it is not my respect which is lacking."

"No, it is your trust, is it not?" said the queen.

"What can you expect?" cried La Mole, "when a man is in your majesty's rooms; when he gains admittance by assuming my clothes, and perhaps my name, who knows" —

"A man!" cried Marguerite, softly pressing her poor lover's arm; "a man! You are modest, Monsieur de la Mole. Look through the opening of the portière and you will see two men."

Marguerite drew back the velvet portière embroidered in gold, and La Mole saw Henry talking with the man in the cherry-colored cloak. Coconnas, as though he himself were concerned, looked also, saw, and recognized De Mouy. Both men stood amazed.

"Now that you are reassured, or at least now that I hope you are," said Marguerite, "take your stand outside my door, and for your life, my dear La Mole, let no one enter. If any one even approaches the stairs, warn me." La Mole, weak and obedient as a child, withdrew, glancing at Coconnas, who looked at him. Both found themselves outside without having thoroughly recovered from their astonishment.

"De Mouy!" cried Coconnas.

"Henry!" murmured La Mole.

"De Mouy with your cherry-colored cloak, your white plume, and your swinging arm."

"Ah!" went on La Mole, "the moment it is not a question of love, it is a question of plot."

"By Heaven! here we are in the midst of politics," said Coconnas grumbling. "Fortunately I do not see Madame de Nevers mixed up in it."

Marguerite returned and sat down by the two speakers. She had been gone only a moment, but had made the most of her time. Gillonne, on guard in the secret passage, and the two gentlemen on duty at the main entrance, assured perfect safety for her.

"Madame," said Henry, "do you think it would be possible for us to be overheard in any way?"

"Monsieur," said Marguerite, "the walls of this room are wadded, and a double wainscoting deadens all sound."

"I depend on you," replied Henry smiling. Then turning to De Mouy:

"Now," said the king, in a low tone, as if in spite of the assurance of Marguerite his fears were not wholly overcome, "what are you here for?"

"Here?" said De Mouy.

"Yes, here, in this room," repeated Henry.

"He had nothing to do here," said Marguerite; "I induced him to come."

"You?"

"I guessed everything."

"You see, De Mouy, we can discover what is going on."

"This morning," continued Marguerite, "Monsieur de Mouy was with Duc François in the apartment of two of his gentlemen."

"You see, De Mouy," repeated Henry, "we know everything."

"That is true," said De Mouy.

"I was sure," said Henry, "that Monsieur d'Alençon had taken possession of you."

"That is your fault, sire. Why did you so persistently refuse what I offered you?"

"You refused!" exclaimed Marguerite. "The refusal I feared, then, was real?"

"Madame," said Henry, shaking his head, "and you, my brave De Mouy, really, you make me laugh with your exclamations. What! a man enters my chamber, speaks to me of a throne, of a revolt, of a revolution, to me, Henry, a prince tolerated provided that I eat humble pie, a Huguenot spared on condition that I play the Catholic; and I am expected to accept, when these propositions are made in a room without padding or double wainscoting! *Ventre saint gris!* You are either children or fools!"

"But, sire, could not your majesty have left me some hope, if not by word, at least by a gesture or sign?"

"What did my brother-in-law say to you, De Mouy?" asked Henry.

"Oh, sire, that is not my secret."

"Well, my God!" continued Henry, with a certain impatience at having to deal with a man who so poorly understood his words. "I do not ask what you proposed to him, I ask you merely if he listened to you, if he heard you."

"He listened, sire, and he heard."

"He listened and he heard! You admit it yourself, De Mouy, tactless conspirator that you are! Had I said one word you would have been lost, for I did not know, I merely suspected that he was there, or if not he, someone else, the Duc d'Anjou, Charles IX., or the queen mother, for instance. You do not know the walls of the Louvre, De Mouy; it was for them that the proverb was made which says that walls have ears; and knowing these walls you expected me to speak! Well, well.

De Mouy, you pay a small compliment to the common sense of the King of Navarre, and I am surprised that not esteeming him more highly you should have offered him a crown."

"But, sire," said De Mouy, "could you not even while refusing this crown have given me some sign? In that case I should not have considered everything hopeless and lost."

"Well! *Ventre saint gris!*" exclaimed Henry, "if one can hear cannot one see also? and is not one lost by a sign as much as by a word? See, De Mouy," continued the king, looking around him, "at the present moment, so near to you that my words do not reach beyond the circle of our three chairs, I still fear I may be overheard when I say: De Mouy, repeat your proposal to me."

"But, sire," cried De Mouy in despair, "I am now engaged with Monsieur d'Alençon."

Marguerite angrily clasped and unclasped her beautiful hands.

"Then it is too late?" said she.

"On the contrary," murmured Henry, "know that even in this, God's hand is visible. Continue your arrangement, De Mouy, for in Duc François lies our safety. Do you suppose that the King of Navarre would guarantee your heads? On the contrary, wretched man, I should have you all killed to the last one, and on the least suspicion. But with a son of France it is different. Secure proofs, De Mouy, ask for guarantees; but, stupid that you are, you will be deeply involved, and one word will suffice for you."

"Oh, sire, it was my despair at your having left us, believe me, which threw me into the arms of the duke; it was also the fear of being betrayed, for he kept our secret."

"Keep his, now, De Mouy; it rests with you. What does he wish? To leave court? Furnish him with means to escape. Work for him, De Mouy, as if you were working for me, turn the shield so that he may parry every blow they aim at us. When it is time to flee, we will both flee. When it is time to fight and reign, I will reign alone."

"Do not trust the duke," said Marguerite, "he is gloomy and acute, without hatred as without love; ever ready to treat his friends like enemies and his enemies like friends."

"And he is expecting you now, De Mouy?" said Henry.

"Yes, sire."

"Where?"

"In the apartment belonging to his two gentlemen."

"At what time?"

"Before midnight."

"It is not yet eleven o'clock," said Henry, "so you have lost no time; now you may go, De Mouy."

"We have your word, monsieur?" said Marguerite.

"Come now, madame!" said Henry, with the confidence he knew so well how to use with certain people and on certain occasions, "with Monsieur de Mouy, such things are not even asked for."

"You are right, sire," replied the young man; "but I need your word, for I shall have to tell the leaders that I have it. You are not a Catholic, are you?"

Henry shrugged his shoulders.

"You do not renounce the kingdom of Navarre?"

"I renounce no kingdom, De Mouy, I merely reserve for myself the choice of the best; that is, the one which shall best suit me and you."

"And if in the meantime your majesty should be arrested, you would promise to reveal nothing even should they torture your royal majesty?"

"De Mouy, I swear that, before God."

"One further word, sire. How am I to see you in future?"

"After to-morrow you shall have a key to my room. You will come there, De Mouy, as often as it may be necessary and when you please. It is for the Duc d'Alençon to answer for your presence in the Louvre. In the meantime, use the small stairway. I will show you the way. The queen will have the cherry-colored cloak like yours come here — the one who was in the antechamber just now. No one must notice any difference between you, or know that there are two of you, De Mouy. Do you not agree with me? And you, madame?" Henry looked at Marguerite and uttered the last words with a smile.

"Yes," said she, without moving a feature; "for this Monsieur de la Mole belongs to my brother, the duke."

"Well, madame, try to win him over to our side," said Henry, in perfect seriousness. "Spare neither gold nor promises; I will put all my treasures at his disposal."

"In that case," said Marguerite, with one of the smiles which belong only to the women of Boccaccio, "since this is your wish, I will do my best to second it."

"Very good, madame; and you, De Mouy, return to the duke, and make sure of him."

CHAPTER XXVI.

MARGARITA.

During the conversation which we have just related, La Mole and Coconnas mounted guard. La Mole somewhat chagrined, Coconnas somewhat anxious. La Mole had had time to reflect, and in this he had been greatly aided by Coconnas.

"What do you think of all this, my friend?" La Mole had asked of Coconnas.

"I think," the Piedmontese had replied, "that there is some court intrigue connected with it."

"And such being the case, are you disposed to play a part in it?"

"My dear fellow," replied Coconnas, "listen well to what I am going to say to you and try and profit by it. In all these princely dealings, in all royal affairs, we can and should be nothing but shadows. Where the King of Navarre leaves a bit of his plume and the Duc d'Alençon a piece of his cloak, we leave our lives. The queen has a fancy for you, and you for her. Nothing is better. Lose your head in love, my dear fellow, but not in politics."

That was wise council. Therefore it was heard by La Mole with the melancholy of a man who feels that, placed between reason and madness, it is madness he will follow.

"I have not a fancy for the queen, Annibal, I love her; and fortunately or unfortunately I love her with all my heart. This is madness, you will say. Well, I admit that I am mad. But you are wise, Coconnas, you ought not to suffer for my foolishness and my misfortune. Go back to our master and do not compromise yourself."

Coconnas pondered an instant. Then raising his head:

"My dear fellow," he replied, "all that you tell me is perfectly reasonable; you are in love — act, therefore, like a lover. I am ambitious, and being so, I think life is worth more to me than a woman's kiss. When I risk my life, I make my own conditions. Try, so far as you are concerned, my poor Medor, to make yours."

Whereupon Coconnas extended his hand to La Mole and withdrew, having exchanged a final glance and a final smile with his friend.

About ten minutes after he left his post, the door opened, and Marguerite, peering out cautiously, took La Mole by the hand and, without uttering a word, drew him from the corridor into the furthest corner of her room. She closed the door behind her with a care which indicated the importance of the conversation she was about to have.

Once in her room she stopped, seated herself on her ebony chair, and drawing La Mole to her, she clasped her hands over both of his.

"Now that we are alone," said she, "let us talk seriously, my very dear friend."

"Seriously, madame," said La Mole.

"Or lovingly. Does that please you better? But there can be serious things in love, and especially in the love of a queen."

"Then — let us talk of serious things; but on condition that your majesty will not be vexed at the lighter things I have to say to you."

"I shall be vexed only at one thing, La Mole, and that is if you address me as 'madame' or 'your majesty.' For you, my beloved, I am just Marguerite."

"Yes, Marguerite! Yes, Margarita! Yes, my pearl!" cried the young man, devouring the queen with his eyes.

"Yes, that is right," said Marguerite. "So you are jealous, my fine gentleman?"

"Oh! unreasonably."

"Still?"

"Madly, Marguerite."

"Jealous of whom? Come!"

"Of everyone."

"But really?"

"Of the king first."

"I should think after what you had seen and heard you might be easy on that point."

"Of this Monsieur de Mouy, whom I saw this morning for the first time, and whom this evening I find so far advanced in his intimacy with you."

"Monsieur de Mouy?"

"Yes."

"Who gave you such ideas about Monsieur de Mouy?"

"Listen! I recognized him from his figure, from the color of his hair, from a natural feeling of hatred. He is the one who was with Monsieur d'Alençon this morning."

"Well, what connection has that with me?"

"Monsieur d'Alençon is your brother. It is said that you are very fond of him. You may have confided to him a vague feeling of your heart, and, according to the custom at court, he has aided your wish by admitting Monsieur de Mouy to your apartment. Now, what I do not understand is how I was fortunate enough to find the king here at the same time. But in any case, madame, be frank with me. In default of other sentiment, a love like mine has the right to demand frankness in return. See, I prostrate myself at your feet. If what you have felt for me is but a passing fancy, I will give you back your trust, your promise, your love; I will give back to Monsieur d'Alençon his kind favors and my post of gentleman, and I will go and seek death at the siege of La Rochelle, if love does not kill me before I have gone as far as that."

Marguerite listened smilingly to these charming words, watching La Mole's graceful gestures, then leaning her beautiful dreamy head on her feverish hand:

"You love me?" she asked.

"Oh, madame! more than life, more than safety, more than all; but you, you — you do not love me."

"Poor fool!" she murmured.

"Ah, yes, madame," cried La Mole, still at her feet, "I have told you I was that."

"The chief thought of your life, then, is your love, dear La Mole!"

"It is the only thought, madame, the sole thought."

"Well, be it so; I will make of all the rest only an accessory to this love. You love me; do you wish to remain near me?"

"My one prayer is that God will never take me from you."

"Well, you shall not leave me. I need you, La Mole."

"You need me? Does the sun need the glow-worm?"

"If I will tell you that I love you, would you be wholly devoted to me?"

"Ah! am I not that already, madame, and more than wholly?"

"Yes, but, God forgive me, you still doubt!"

"Oh! I am wrong, I am ungrateful, or, rather, as I have told you and repeated to you, I am a fool. But why was Monsieur de Mouy with you this evening? why did I see him this morning with Monsieur le Duc d'Alençon? Why that cherry-

colored cloak, that white plume, that affected imitation of my gait? Ah! madame, it is not you whom I suspect, but your brother."

"Wretched man!" said Marguerite, "wretched man to suppose that Duc François would push complacency so far as to introduce a wooer to his sister's room! Mad enough to be jealous, and yet not to have guessed! Do you know, La Mole, that the Duc d'Alençon would run you through with his own sword if he knew that you were here, this evening, at my feet, and that instead of sending you away I were saying to you: 'Stay here where you are, La Mole; for I love you, my fine gentleman, do you hear? I love you!' Ah, yes! he would certainly kill you."

"Great God!" cried La Mole, starting back and looking at Marguerite in terror, "is it possible?"

"Everything is possible, my friend, in these times and at this court. Now, one word; it was not for me that Monsieur de Mouy, in your cloak, his face hidden under your hat, came to the Louvre. It was for Monsieur d'Alençon. But I, thinking it was you, brought him here. He knows our secret, La Mole, and must be carefully managed."

"I should prefer to kill him," said La Mole; "that is shorter and surer."

"And I, my brave gentleman," said the queen, "I prefer him to live, and for you to know everything, for not only is his life useful to us, but it is necessary. Listen and weigh your words well before you answer. Do you love me enough, La Mole, to be glad if I were really to become a queen; that is, queen of a real kingdom?"

"Alas, madame, I love you enough to wish what you wish, even should this desire ruin my whole life!"

"Well, do you want to aid me to realize this desire, which would make you still happier?"

"Oh! I should lose you, madame," cried La Mole hiding his head in his hands.

"No, on the contrary. Instead of being the first of my servants, you would become the first of my subjects, that is all."

"Oh! no interest — no ambition, madame — do not sully the feeling I have for you — the devotion, nothing but devotion!"

"Noble nature!" said Marguerite; "well, yes, I accept your devotion, and I shall find out how to reward it."

She extended both her hands, and La Mole covered them with kisses.

"Well!" said she.

"Well, yes!" replied La Mole, "yes, Marguerite, I am beginning to comprehend this vague project already talked of by us Huguenots before the massacre of Saint Bartholomew, the scheme for the execution of which I, like many another worthier than myself, was sent to Paris. You covet this actual kingdom of Navarre which is to take the place of an imaginary kingdom. King Henry drives you to it; De Mouy conspires with you, does he not? But the Duc d'Alençon, what is he doing in it all? Where is there a throne for him? I do not see. Now, is the Duc d'Alençon sufficiently your — friend to aid you in all this without asking anything in exchange for the danger he runs?"

"The duke, my friend, is conspiring on his own account. Let us leave him to his illusions. His life answers for ours."

"But I, who belong to him, can I betray him?"

"Betray him! In what are you betraying him? What has he confided to you? Is it not he who has betrayed you by giving your cloak and hat to De Mouy as a means of gaining him admittance to his apartments? You belong to him, you say! Were you not mine, my gentleman, before you were his? Has he given you a greater proof of friendship than the proof of love you have from me?"

La Mole arose, pale and completely overcome.

"Oh!" he murmured, "Coconnas was right, intrigue is enveloping me in its folds. It will suffocate me."

"Well?" asked Marguerite.

"Well," said La Mole, "this is my answer: it is said, and I heard it at the other end of France, where your illustrious name and your universal reputation for beauty touched my heart like a vague desire for the unknown, — it is said that sometimes you love, but that your love is always fatal to those you love, so that death, jealous, no doubt, almost always removes your lovers."

"La Mole!"

"Do not interrupt me, oh, my well-loved Margarita, for they add that you preserve the hearts of these faithful friends in gold boxes,[1] and that occasionally you bestow a melancholy

[1] She was in the habit of carrying a large farthingale, containing pockets, in each of which she put a gold box in which was the heart of one of her dead lovers; for she was

thought, a pious glance on the sad remains. You sigh, my queen, your eyes droop; it is true. Well! make me the dearest and the happiest of your favorites. You have pierced the hearts of others, and you keep their hearts. You do more with me, you expose my head. Well, Marguerite, swear to me before the image of the God who has saved my life in this very place, swear to me, that if I die for you, as a sad presentiment tells me I shall do, swear to me that you will keep my head, which the hangman will separate from my body; and that you will sometimes press your lips to it. Swear, Marguerite, and the promise of such reward bestowed by my queen will make me silent, and, if necessary, a traitor and a coward; this is being wholly devoted, as your lover and your accomplice should be."

"Oh! what ghastly foolishness, dear heart!" said Marguerite. "Oh! fatal thought, sweet love."

"Swear"—

"Swear?"

"Yes, on this silver chest with its cross. Swear."

"Well!" said Marguerite, "if — and God forbid! — your gloomy presentiment is realized, my fine gentleman, on this cross I swear to you that you shall be near me, living or dead, so long as I live; and if I am unable to rescue you from the peril which comes to you through me, through me alone, I will at least give to your poor soul the consolation for which you ask, and which you will so well have deserved."

"One word more, Marguerite. I can die now. I shall not mind death; but I can live, too, for we may succeed. The King of Navarre, king, you may be queen, in which case he will take you away. This vow of separation between you will some day be broken, and will do away with ours. Now, Marguerite, my well-beloved Marguerite, with a word you have taken away my every fear of death; now with a word keep up my courage concerning life."

"Oh, fear nothing, I am yours, body and soul!" cried Marguerite, again raising her hand to the cross on the little chest. "If I leave, you follow, and if the king refuses to take you, then I shall not go."

"But you dare not resist!"

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careful as they died to have their hearts embalmed. This farthingale hung every night from a hook which was secured by a padlock behind the headboard of her bed. (Tallemant Des Réaux, *History of Marguerite of Valois.*)

"My well-beloved Hyacinthe," said Marguerite, "you do not know Henry. At present he is thinking of only one thing, that is, of being king. For this he would sacrifice everything he owns, and, still more, what he does not own. Now, adieu!"

"Madame," said La Mole, smiling, "are you going to send me away?"

"It is late," said Marguerite.

"No doubt; but where would you have me go? Monsieur de Mouy is in my room with Monsieur le Duc d'Alençon."

"Ah! yes," said Marguerite, with a beautiful smile. "Besides, I have still some things to tell you about this conspiracy."

From that night La Mole was no longer an ordinary favorite. He well might carry his head high, for which, living or dead, so sweet a future was in store.

And yet at times his weary brow was bent, his cheek grew pale, and deep thoughts ploughed their furrows on the forehead of the young man, once so light-hearted, now so happy!

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE HAND OF GOD.

On leaving Madame de Sauve Henry had said to her:

"Go to bed, Charlotte. Pretend that you are very ill, and on no account see any one all day to-morrow."

Charlotte obeyed without questioning the reason for this suggestion from the king. She was beginning to be accustomed to his eccentricities, as we should call them to-day, or to his whims as they were then called. Moreover, she knew that deep in his heart Henry hid secrets which he told to no one, in his mind plans which he feared to reveal even in his dreams; so that she carried out all his wishes, knowing that his most peculiar ideas had an object.

Whereupon that evening she complained to Dariole of great heaviness in her head, accompanied by dizziness. These were the symptoms which Henry had suggested to her to feign.

The following day she pretended that she wanted to rise, but scarcely had she put her foot on the floor when she said she felt a general debility, and went back to bed.

This indisposition, which Henry had already announced to the Duc d'Alençon, was the first news brought to Catharine when she calmly asked why La Sauve was not present as usual at her levee.

"She is ill!" replied Madame de Lorraine, who was there.

"Ill!" repeated Catharine, without a muscle of her face betraying the interest she took in the answer. "Some idle fatigue, perhaps."

"No, madame," replied the princess. "She complains of a severe headache and of weakness which prevents her from walking." Catharine did not answer. But, to hide her joy, she turned to the window, and perceiving Henry, who was crossing the court after his conversation with De Mouy, she rose the better to see him. Driven by that conscience which, although invisible, always throbs in the deepest recesses of hearts most hardened to crime:

"Does not my son Henry seem paler than usual this morning?" she asked her captain of the guards.

There was nothing in the question. Henry was greatly troubled mentally; but physically he was very strong.

By degrees those usually present at the queen's levee withdrew. Three or four intimate ones remained longer than the others, but Catharine impatiently dismissed them, saying that she wished to be alone. When the last courtier had gone Catharine closed the door and going to a secret closet hidden in one of the panels of her room she slid back a door in a groove of wood and took out a book, the worn leaves of which showed frequent use. Placing the volume on a table, she opened it to a book-mark, then resting her elbow on the table and her head on one hand:

"That is it," murmured she, reading, "'headache, general weakness, pain in the eyes, swelling of the palate.' As yet they have mentioned only the pains in the head and weakness. But the other symptoms will not be slow in forthcoming."

She continued:

"'Then the inflammation reaches the throat, extends to the stomach, surrounds the heart like a circle of fire, and causes the brain to burst like a thunderclap,'" she read on to herself. Then in a low voice:

"For the fever, six hours; for the general inflammation, twelve hours; for the gangrene, twelve hours; for the suffering, six hours; in all thirty-six hours. Now, suppose that the

absorption is slow, and that instead of thirty-six hours we have forty, even forty-eight, yes, forty-eight hours should suffice. But Henry, how is it that he is still up? Because he is a man, because he has a strong constitution, because perhaps he drank after he kissed her, and wiped his lips after drinking."

Catharine awaited the dinner hour with impatience.

Henry dined every day at the king's table. He came, he in turn complained of pain in his head; he ate nothing, and withdrew immediately after the meal, saying that having been awake a part of the previous night, he felt a pressing need of sleep.

Catharine listened as his uncertain steps died away. Then she had him followed. She was told that the King of Navarre had gone to Madame de Sauve's apartments.

"Henry," said she to herself, "will this evening complete the work of death which some unfortunate chance has left half finished."

The King of Navarre had indeed gone to Madame de Sauve's room, but it was to tell her to continue playing her rôle.

The whole of the following morning Henry did not leave his chamber; nor did he appear at dinner. Madame de Sauve, they said, was growing worse and worse, and the report of Henry's illness, spread abroad by Catharine herself, sped like one of those presentiments which hover in the air, but which no one can explain.

Catharine was delighted. The previous morning she had sent Ambroise Paré to help one of her favorite servants, who was ill at Saint Germain, so it had to be one of her own men who was called in to see Madame de Sauve and Henry. This man would say only what she wished him to say. If, contrary to all expectation, some other doctor had been summoned, and if some whisper concerning poison had frightened the court, in which so many such reports had already been circulated, she counted greatly on the rumor to arouse the jealousy of Marguerite regarding the various loves of her husband. We remember she had spoken strongly of this jealousy which had been apparent on various occasions; among others, on the hawthorn walk, where, in the presence of several persons, she had said to her daughter:

"So you are very jealous, Marguerite?" Therefore, with unruffled features she waited for the door to open, when some pale, startled servant would enter, crying:

"Your majesty, the King of Navarre has been hurt, and Madame de Sauve is dead!" Four o'clock in the afternoon struck. Catharine finished her luncheon in the aviary, where she was crumbling some bread for her rare birds which she herself had raised. Although her face was calm and even gloomy, as usual, her heart throbbed violently at the slightest sound. Suddenly the door opened.

"Madame," said the captain of the guards, "the King of Navarre is" —

"Ill?" hastily interrupted Catharine.

"No, madame, thank God! His majesty seems to be wonderfully well."

"What is it, then?"

"The King of Navarre is here."

"What does he want?"

"He is bringing your majesty a rare kind of monkey."

Just then Henry entered holding in his hand a basket, in which was a little monkey he was petting.

He entered smiling and seemed wholly absorbed in the dear little animal he brought; but occupied as he appeared to be, he did not fail to give his usual first glance around. This was sufficient for him under trying circumstances. As to Catharine, she was very pale, of a pallor which deepened as she saw that the cheeks of the young man were flushed with the glow of health.

The queen mother was amazed at this turn of affairs. She accepted Henry's gift mechanically, appeared agitated, complimented him on looking so well, and added:

"I am all the more pleased to see you looking so, because I heard that you were ill, and because, if I remember rightly, you yourself complained of not feeling well, in my presence. But I understand now," she added, trying to smile, "it was an excuse so that you might be free."

"No, I have really been very ill, madame," said Henry, "but a specific used in our mountains, and which comes from my mother, has cured my indisposition."

"Ah! you will give me the recipe, will you not, Henry?" said Catharine, really smiling this time, but with an irony she could not disguise.

"Some counter-poison," she murmured. "We must look into this; but no, seeing Madame de Sauve ill, it will be suspected. Indeed, I believe that the hand of God is over this man."

Catharine waited impatiently for the night. Madame de Sauve did not appear. At play she inquired for her, but was told that she was suffering more and more.

All the evening she was restless, and everyone anxiously wondered what were the thoughts which could move this face usually so calm.

At length everyone retired. Catharine had herself undressed and put to bed by her ladies-in-waiting. Then when everyone had gone to sleep in the Louvre, she rose, slipped on a long black dressing-gown, took a lamp, chose from her keys the one which unlocked the door of Madame de Sauve's apartments, and ascended the stairs to see her maid-of-honor.

Had Henry foreseen this visit? Was he busy in his own rooms? Was he hiding somewhere? However this may have been, the young woman was alone. Catharine opened the door cautiously, crossed the antechamber, entered the reception-room, set her lamp on a table, for a night lamp was burning near the sick woman, and glided like a shadow into the sleeping-room. Dariole in a deep armchair was sleeping near the bed of her mistress.

This bed was entirely shut in by curtains.

The respiration of the young woman was so light that for an instant Catharine thought she was not breathing at all.

At length she heard a slight sigh, and with an evil joy she raised the curtain in order to see for herself the effect of the terrible poison. She trembled in advance at the sight of the livid pallor or the devouring purple of the mortal fever she hoped for. But instead of this, calm, with eyes hidden under their white lids, her mouth rosy and half open, her moist cheek pressed gently against one of her gracefully rounded arms, while the other arm, fresh and pearly, was thrown across the crimson damask which served as counterpane, the beautiful young woman lay sleeping with a smile still on her lips. No doubt some sweet dream brought the smile to her lips, and to her cheek the flush of health which nothing could disturb. Catharine could not refrain from uttering a cry of surprise which roused Dariole for a moment. The queen mother hastily stepped behind the curtains of the bed.

Dariole opened her eyes, but overcome with sleep, without even wondering in her drowsy mind why she had wakened, the young girl dropped her heavy lids and slept again.

Then Catharine came from behind the curtain, and glancing

at the other objects in the room, saw on a table a bottle of Spanish wine, some fruit, pastry, and two glasses. Henry must have had supper with the baroness, who apparently was as well as himself. Walking on tiptoe, Catharine took up the small silver box that was partly empty. It was the same or very similar to the one she had sent to Charlotte. She removed from it a piece as large as a pearl on the point of a gold needle, returned to her room, and gave it to the little ape which Henry had brought her that evening. Attracted by the aromatic odor the animal devoured it eagerly, and turning around in his basket, went to sleep. Catharine waited a quarter of an hour.

"With half of what he has just eaten," said she, "my dog Brutus died, swelling up instantly. Some one has played me a trick. Is it Réné? Impossible. Then it is Henry. O fatality! It is very evident that since he is to reign he cannot die. But perhaps the poison was not strong enough. We shall see by trying steel."

And Catharine went to bed revolving in her mind a fresh idea which no doubt was perfected the following day; for she called her captain of the guards to her, gave him a letter, ordered him to take it to its address and to deliver it only into the hands of the one for whom it was intended. It was addressed to the Sire de Louvièrs de Maurevel, Captain of the King's Petard Makers, Rue de la Cerisaie, near the Arsenal.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE LETTER FROM ROME.

Several days elapsed after the events we have just described, when one morning a litter escorted by several gentlemen wearing the colors of Monsieur de Guise entered the Louvre, and word was brought to the Queen of Navarre that Madame la Duchesse de Nevers begged the honor of an audience. Marguerite was receiving a call from Madame de Sauve. It was the first time the beautiful baroness had been out since her pretended illness. She knew that the queen had expressed to her husband great anxiety on account of her indisposition, which for almost a week had been court gossip, and she had come to thank her.

Marguerite congratulated her on her convalescence and on her good fortune at having recovered so quickly from the strange malady, the seriousness of which as a daughter of France she could not fail to appreciate.

"I trust you will attend the hunt, already once postponed," said Marguerite. "It is planned positively for to-morrow. For winter, the weather is very mild. The sun has softened the earth, and the hunters all say that the day will be fine."

"But, madame," said the baroness, "I do not know if I shall be strong enough."

"Bah!" exclaimed Marguerite, "make an effort; moreover, since I am one of the hunters, I have told the King to reserve a small Béarnese horse which I was to ride, but which will carry you perfectly. Have you not already heard of it?"

"Yes, madame, but I did not know that it was meant for your majesty. Had I known that I should not have accepted it."

"From a feeling of pride, baroness?"

"No, madame, from a feeling of humility, on the contrary."

"Then you will come?"

"Your majesty overwhelms me with honor. I will come, since you command me."

At that moment Madame la Duchesse de Nevers was announced. At this name Marguerite gave a cry of such delight that the baroness understood that the two women wanted to talk together. She rose to leave.

"Until to-morrow, then," said Marguerite.

"Until to-morrow, madame."

"By the way," continued Marguerite holding the baroness by the hand, "you know that in public I hate you, for I am horribly jealous of you."

"But in private?" asked Madame de Sauve.

"Oh! in private, not only do I forgive you, but more than that, I thank you."

"Then your majesty will permit me"—

Marguerite held out her hand, the baroness kissed it respectfully, made a low courtesy and went out.

While Madame de Sauve ascended her stairway, bounding like a deer whose tether has been broken, Madame de Nevers was exchanging a few formal words with the queen, which gave time to the gentlemen who had accompanied her to retire.

"Gillonne," cried Marguerite when the door was closed behind the last, "Gillonne, see that no one interrupts us."

"Yes," said the duchess, "for we have matters of grave importance to discuss."

Taking a chair she seated herself without ceremony in the best place near the fire and in the sunlight, sure that no one would interrupt the pleasant intimacy between herself and the Queen of Navarre.

"Well," said Marguerite, with a smile, "what about our famous slaughterer?"

"My dear queen," said the duchess, "he is a mythological creature, upon my word. He is incomparable, so far as his mind is concerned, and never dries up. He makes witty remarks that would make a saint in her shrine die of laughing. In other respects he is the maddest heathen who ever walked in the skin of a Catholic! I dote on him! And you, what are you doing with your Apollo?"

"Alas!" said Marguerite with a sigh.

"Oh, how that 'alas!' frightens me, dear queen! Is the gentle La Mole too respectful or too sentimental? In that, I am forced to admit he would be exactly the opposite of his friend Coconnas."

"Oh, no, he has his moments," said Marguerite, "but this 'alas!' concerned only myself."

"What does it mean, then?"

"It means, dear duchess, that I am terribly afraid I am actually in love."

"Really?"

"On my honor!"

"Oh! so much the better! What a merry life we can lead!" cried Henriette. "To love a little is my dream; to love much, is yours. It is so sweet, dear and learned queen, to rest the mind by the heart, is it not? and to have the smile after the delirium. Ah, Marguerite, I have a feeling that we are going to have a glorious year!"

"Do you think so?" said the queen. "I, on the contrary, do not know how that may be; I see things through a veil. All these politics occupy me so much. By the way, do you know if your Annibal is as devoted to my brother as he seems to be? Find out for me. I must know."

"He, devoted to anybody or anything! It is easy to see that you do not know him as I do. If he ever is devoted to

anything it will be his ambition, and that is all. If your brother is a man to make great promises to him, well, he will be devoted to your brother; but let your brother, son of France that he is, be careful not to break the promises he makes him. If he does, my faith, look out for your brother!"

"Really?"

"It is just as I say. Truly, Marguerite, there are times when this tiger whom I have tamed frightens me. The other day I said to him, 'Annibal, be careful, do not deceive me, for if you do!'—I said it, however, with my emerald eyes which prompted Ronsard's lines:

[1] "'*La Duchesse de Nevers,*
Aux yeux verts,
Qui, sous leur paupière blonde
Lancent sur nous plus d'éclairs
Que ne font vingt Jupiters
Dans les airs
Lorsque la tempête gronde.'"

"Well?"

"Well, I supposed he would answer me: 'I deceive you! I! never! etc., etc.' But do you know what he did answer?"

"No."

"Well, judge of the man! 'And you,' he replied, 'if you deceive me, you take care too, for, princess that you are'—and as he said this he threatened me not only with his eyes, but with his slender pointed finger, with its nail cut like a steel lance, which he held before my nose. At that moment, my poor queen, I confess he looked so fierce that I trembled, and yet you know I am no coward."

"He threatened you, Henriette, he dared?"

"Well, I had threatened him! For that matter he was right. So you see he is devoted up to a certain point, or rather to a very uncertain point."

"In that case we shall see," said Marguerite thoughtfully; "I will speak to La Mole. Have you nothing else to tell me?"

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[1] Fair duchess, your dear eyes
Are emerald skies,
Half hid 'neath cloud-lids white,
Whence fiercer lightning flies,
Launched forth for our surprise,
Than could arise
From twenty Joves in furious might.

"Yes; something most interesting for which I came. But, the idea, you have told me more interesting things still. I have received news."

"From Rome?"

"Yes, through a courier from my husband."

"Ah! the Poland affair?"

"It is progressing beautifully, and probably in a day or two you will be rid of your brother of Anjou."

"So the pope has ratified his election?"

"Yes, my dear."

"And you never told me!" cried Marguerite. "Well, quick, quick, the details."

"Oh, mercy, I have none except those I have given you. But wait, I will give you the letter from Monsieur de Nevers. Here it is. Oh, no, those are some verses from Annibal, atrocious ones too, my poor Marguerite. He can not write any other kind. But wait, here it is. No, it isn't, that is a note of my own which I brought for you to have La Mole give him. Ah! at last, here it is." And Madame de Nevers handed the letter to the queen.

Marguerite opened it hastily and read it; but it told nothing more than she had already learned from her friend.

"How did you receive this?" continued the queen.

"From a courier of my husband, who had orders to stop at the Hôtel de Guise before going to the Louvre, and to deliver this letter to me before delivering that of the King. I knew the importance my queen would attach to this news, and I had written to Monsieur de Nevers to act thus. He obeyed, you see; he is not like that monster of a Coconnas. Now there is no one in the whole of Paris, except the King, you, and I, who knows this news; except the man who followed our courier"—

"What man?"

"Oh! the horrid business! Imagine how tired, worn out, and dusty the wretched messenger was when he arrived! He rode seven days, day and night, without stopping an instant."

"But the man you spoke of just now?"

"Wait a minute. Constantly followed by a wild-looking fellow who had relays like himself and who rode as far as he did for the four hundred leagues, the poor courier constantly expected to be shot in his back. Both reached the Saint Marcel gate at the same time, both galloped down the Rue Mouffetard, both crossed the city. But at the end of the

bridge of Nôtre-Dame our courier turned to the right, while the other took the road to the left by the Place du Châtelet, and sped along the quays by the side of the Louvre, like an arrow from a bow."

"Thanks, my good Henriette, thanks!" cried Marguerite. "You are right; that is very interesting news. By whom was the other courier sent? I must know. So leave me until this evening. Rue Tizon, is it not? and the hunt to-morrow. Do take a frisky horse, so that he will run away, and we can be by ourselves. I will tell you this evening what is necessary for you to try and find out from your Coconnas."

"You will not forget my letter?" said the duchess of Nevers smiling.

"No, no, do not worry; he shall have it, and at once."

Madame de Nevers left, and Marguerite immediately sent for Henry, who came to her quickly. She gave him the letter from the Duc de Nevers.

"Oh! oh!" he exclaimed.

Then Marguerite told him about the second courier.

"Yes," said Henry; "I saw him enter the Louvre."

"Perhaps he was for the queen mother."

"No, I am sure of that, for I ventured to take my stand in the corridor, and I saw no one pass."

"Then," said Marguerite, looking at her husband, "he must be" —

"For your brother D'Alençon, must he not?" said Henry.

"Yes; but how can we be sure?"

"Could not one of his two gentlemen be sent for?" said Henry, carelessly, "and through him" —

"You are right," said Marguerite, put at her ease at her husband's suggestion. "I will send for Monsieur de la Mole. Gillonne! Gillonne!"

The young girl appeared.

"I must speak at once with Monsieur de la Mole," said the queen. "Try to find him and bring him here."

Gillonne disappeared. Henry seated himself before a table on which was a German book containing engravings by Albert Durer, which he began to examine with such close attention that when La Mole entered he did not seem to hear him, and did not even raise his head.

On his side, the young man, seeing the king with Marguerite, stopped on the threshold, silent from surprise and pale from anxiety.

Marguerite went to him.

"Monsieur de la Mole," said she, "can you tell me who is on guard to-day at Monsieur d'Alençon's?"

"Coconnas, madame," said La Mole.

"Try to find out for me from him if he admitted to his master's room a man covered with mud, who apparently had a long or hasty ride."

"Ah, madame, I fear he will not tell me; for several days he has been very taciturn."

"Indeed! But by giving him this note, it seems to me that he will owe you something in exchange."

"From the duchess! Oh, with this note I will try."

"Add," said Marguerite, lowering her voice, "that this note will serve him as a means of gaining entrance this evening to the house you know about."

"And I, madame," said La Mole, in a low tone, "what shall be mine?"

"Give your name. That will be enough."

"Give me the note, madame," said La Mole, with throbbing heart, "I will bring back the answer."

He withdrew.

"We shall know to-morrow if the duke has been informed of the Poland affair," said Marguerite calmly, turning to her husband.

"That Monsieur de la Mole is really a fine servant," said the Béarnais, with his peculiar smile, "and, by Heaven! I will make his fortune!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE DEPARTURE.

When on the following day a beautiful sun, red but rayless, as is apt to be the case on privileged days of winter, rose behind the hills of Paris, everything had already been awake for two hours in the court of the Louvre. A magnificent Barbary horse, nervous and spirited, with limbs like those of a stag, on which the veins crossed one another like network, pawed the ground, pricked up his ears and snorted, while waiting for Charles IX. He was less impa-

tient, however, than his master who, detained by Catharine, had been stopped by her in the hall. She had said she wished to speak to him on a matter of importance. Both were in the corridor with the glass windows. Catharine was cold, pale, and quiet as usual. Charles IX. fretted, bit his nails, and whipped his two favorite dogs. The latter were covered with cuirasses of mail, so that the snout of the wild boar should not harm them, and that they might be able to encounter the terrible animal with impunity. A small scutcheon with the arms of France had been stitched on their breasts similar to those on the breasts of the pages, who, more than once, had envied the privileges of these happy favorites.

"Pay attention, Charles," said Catharine, "no one but you and I knows as yet of the expected arrival of these Polonais. But, God forgive me, the King of Navarre acts as if he knew. In spite of his abjuration, which I always mistrust, he is in communication with the Huguenots. Have you noticed how often he has gone out the past few days? He has money, too, he who has never had any. He buys horses, arms, and on rainy days he practises fencing from morning until night."

"Well, my God, mother!" exclaimed Charles IX., impatiently, "do you think he intends to kill me, or my brother D'Anjou? In that case he will need a few more lessons, for yesterday I counted eleven buttonholes with my foil on his doublet, which, however, had only six. And as to my brother D'Anjou, you know that he fences as well if not better than I do; at least so people say."

"Listen, Charles," continued Catharine, "and do not treat lightly what your mother tells you. The ambassadors will arrive; well, you will see! As soon as they are in Paris, Henry will do all he can to gain their attention. He is insinuating, he is crafty; without mentioning his wife who seconds him, I know not why, and will chat with them, and talk Latin, Greek, Hungarian, and I know not what, to them! Oh, I tell you, Charles, — and you know that I am not mistaken, — I tell you that there is something on foot."

Just then the clock struck and Charles IX. stopped listening to his mother to count the strokes.

"Good heavens! seven o'clock!" he exclaimed, "one hour before we get off, that will make it eight; one hour to reach the meeting-place, and to start again — we shall not be able to begin hunting before nine o'clock. Really, mother, you make

me lose a great deal of time! Down, Risquetout! great Heavens! down, I say, you brigand!"

And a vigorous blow of the bloody whip on the mastiff's back brought a howl of real pain from the poor beast, thoroughly astonished at receiving punishment in exchange for a caress.

"Charles!" said Catharine, "listen to me, in God's name, and do not leave to chance your fortune and that of France! The hunt, the hunt, the hunt, you cry; why, you will have time enough to hunt when your work of king is settled."

"Come now, mother!" exclaimed Charles, pale with impatience, "explain quickly, for you bother me to death. Really, there are days when I cannot comprehend you."

He stopped beating his whip against his boot.

Catharine thought that the time had come and that it should not be passed by.

"My son," said she, "we have proof that De Mouy has returned to Paris. Monsieur de Maurevel, whom you are well acquainted with, has seen him. This can be only for the King of Navarre. That is enough, I trust, for us to suspect him more than ever."

"Come, there you go again after my poor Henriot! You want me to have him killed; do you not?"

"Oh, no."

"Exiled? But why can you not see that if he were exiled he would be much more dangerous than he will ever be here, in the Louvre, under our eyes, where he can do nothing without our knowing it at once?"

"Therefore I do not wish him exiled."

"What do you want, then? Tell me quickly!"

"I want him to be held in safe keeping while these Polonais are here; in the Bastille, for instance."

"Ah! my faith, no!" cried Charles IX. "We are going to hunt the boar this morning and Henry is one of my best men. Without him the fun would be spoiled. By Heaven, mother! really, you do nothing but vex me."

"Why, my dear son, I did not say this morning. The ambassadors do not arrive until to-morrow or the day after. Arrest him after your hunt, this evening — to-night" —

"That is a different matter. Well, we will talk about it later and see. After the hunt I will not refuse. Adieu! Come here, Risquetout! Is it your turn to sulk now?"

"Charles," said Catharine, laying a detaining hand on his arm at the risk of a fresh explosion which might result from this new delay, "I think that the best thing to do is to sign the order for arrest at once, even though it is not to be carried out until this evening or to-night."

"Sign, write an order, look up a seal for the parchment when they are waiting for me to go hunting, I, who never keep anyone waiting! The devil take the thought!"

"Why, no, I love you too dearly to delay you. I arranged everything beforehand; step in here and see!"

And Catharine, as agile as if she were only twenty years old, pushed open a door of her cabinet, and pointed to an inkstand, pen, parchment, the seal, and a lighted candle.

The king took the parchment and read it through hastily.

"*Order, etc., etc., to arrest and conduct to the Bastille our brother Henry of Navarre.*"

"Good, that is done!" he exclaimed, signing hurriedly. "Adieu, mother."

He hastened from the room, followed by his dogs, greatly pleased to have gotten rid of Catharine so easily.

Charles IX. had been waited for with impatience, and as his promptness in hunting matters was well known, every one wondered at the delay. So when he finally appeared, the hunters welcomed him by shouts of "Long live the King!" the outriders by a flourish of trumpets, the horses by neighing, the dogs by barking. All this noise and hubbub brought a flush to his pale cheeks, his heart swelled, and for a moment Charles was young and happy.

The King scarcely took the time to salute the brilliant company gathered in the court-yard. He nodded to the Duc d'Alençon, waved his hand to his sister Marguerite, passed Henry without apparently seeing him, and sprang upon the fiery Barbary horse, which started off at once. But after curvetting around three or four times, he realized what sort of a rider he had to deal with and quieted down. The trumpets again sounded, and the King left the Louvre followed by the Duc d'Alençon, the King of Navarre, Marguerite, Madame de Nevers, Madame de Sauve, Tavannes, and the principal courtiers.

It goes without saying that La Mole and Coconnas were of the number.

As to the Duc d'Anjou, he had been at the siege of La Rochelle for three months.

While waiting for the King, Henry had spoken to his wife, who in returning his greeting had whispered,

"The courier from Rome was admitted by Monsieur de Coconnas himself to the chamber of the Duc d'Alençon a quarter of an hour before the messenger from the Duc de Nevers saw the King."

"Then he knows all," said Henry.

"He must know all," replied Marguerite; "but keep your eyes on him and see how, in spite of his usual dissimulation, his eyes shine."

"*Ventre saint gris!*" murmured the Béarnais. "I should think they would; he hunts triple game to-day: France, Poland, and Navarre, without counting the wild boar."

He bowed to his wife, returned to his place, and calling one of his servants whose ancestors had been in the service of his father for more than a century, and whom he employed as ordinary messenger in his love affairs:

"Orthon," said he, "take this key to the cousin of Madame de Sauve, who you know lives with his mistress at the corner of the Rue des Quatre Fils. Say to him that his cousin desires to speak to him this evening; that he is to enter my room, and, in case I am not there, to wait for me. If I am late, he is to lie down on my bed."

"Is there an answer, sire?"

"No, except to tell me if you find him. The key is for him alone, you understand?"

"Yes, sire."

"Wait; do not start now, plague you! Before leaving Paris I will call you to tighten my saddle-girths; in that way you will naturally have to lag behind, and you can carry out your commission and join us at Bondy."

The servant made a sign of obedience and rode away.

They set out by the Rue Saint Honorè, through the Rue Saint Denis, and the Faubourg. At the Rue Saint Laurent the saddle-girths of the King of Navarre became loose. Orthon rode up to him, and everything happened as had been agreed on between him and his master, who followed the royal procession along the Rue des Récollets, where his faithful servant sought the Rue du Temple.

When Henry overtook the King, Charles was engaged in

such an interesting conversation with the Duc d'Alençon, on the subject of the weather, the age of the wild boar which was a recluse, and as to where he had made his lair, that he did not notice, or pretended he did not notice, that Henry had lagged behind a moment.

In the meantime Marguerite had watched each countenance from afar and thought she perceived a certain embarrassment in the eyes of her brother every time she looked at him. Madame de Nevers was abandoning herself to mad gayety, for Coconnas, supremely happy that day, was making numberless jokes near her to make the ladies laugh.

As to La Mole he had already twice found an opportunity to kiss Marguerite's white scarf with gold fringe, without the act, which was carried out with the skill usual to lovers, having been seen by more than three or four.

About a quarter-past eight they reached Bondy. The first thought of Charles IX. was to find out if the wild boar had held out.

The boar was in his lair, and the outrider who had turned him aside answered for him. A breakfast was ready. The King drank a glass of Hungarian wine. Charles IX. invited the ladies to take seats at table, and in his impatience to pass away the time set out to visit the kennels and the roosts, giving orders not to unsaddle his horse, as he said he had never had a better or a stronger mount.

While the King was taking this stroll, the Duc de Guise arrived. He was armed for war rather than for hunting, and was accompanied by twenty or thirty gentlemen equipped in like manner. He asked at once for the King, joined him, and returned talking with him.

At exactly nine o'clock the King himself gave the signal to start, and each one mounted and set out to the meet. During the ride Henry found another opportunity to be near his wife.

"Well," said he, "do you know anything new?"

"No," replied Marguerite, "unless it is that my brother Charles looks at you strangely."

"I have noticed it," said Henry.

"Have you taken precautions?"

"I have on a coat of mail, and at my side a good Spanish hunting knife, as sharp as a razor, and as pointed as a needle. I could pierce pistols with it."

"In that case," said Marguerite, "God protect you!"

The outrider in charge of the hunt made a sign. They had reached the lair.

CHAPTER XXX.

MAUREVEL.

While all this careless, light-hearted youth, apparently so at least, was scattering like a gilded whirlwind along the road to Bondy, Catharine, still rolling up the precious parchment to which King Charles had just affixed his signature, admitted into her room a man to whom, a few days before, her captain of the guards had carried a letter, addressed to Rue de la Cerisaie, near the Arsenal.

A broad silk band like a badge of mourning hid one of the man's eyes, showing only the other eye, two prominent cheek-bones, and the curve of a vulture's nose, while a grayish beard covered the lower part of his face. He wore a long thick cloak, beneath which one might have imagined a whole arsenal. Besides this, although it was not the custom of those called to court, he wore at his side a long campaign sword, broad, and with a double blade. One of his hands was hidden beneath his cloak, and never left the handle of a long dagger.

"Ah! you here, monsieur?" said the queen seating herself; "you know that I promised you after Saint Bartholomew, when you rendered us such signal service, not to let you be idle. The opportunity has arisen, or rather I have made it. Thank me, therefore."

"Madame, I humbly thank your majesty," replied the man with the black bandage, in a reserved voice at once low and insolent.

"A fine opportunity; you will not find another such in your whole life. Make the most of it, therefore."

"I am waiting, madame, only after the preamble, I fear" —

"That the commission may not be much? Are not those who wish to advance fond of such commissions? The one of which I speak would be envied by the Tavannes and even by the De Guises."

"Ah! madame," said the man, "believe me, I am at your majesty's orders, whatever they may be."

"In that case, read," said Catharine.

She handed him the parchment. The man read it and grew pale.

"What!" he exclaimed, "an order to arrest the King of Navarre!"

"Well! what is there strange in that?"

"But a king, madame! Really, I think — I fear I am not of sufficiently high rank."

"My confidence makes you the first gentleman of my court, Monsieur de Maurevel," said Catharine.

"I thank your majesty," said the assassin so moved that he seemed to hesitate.

"You will obey, then?"

"If your majesty orders it, is it not my duty?"

"Yes, I order it."

"Then I will obey."

"How shall you go to work?"

"Why, madame, I do not know, I should greatly like to be guided by your majesty."

"You fear noise?"

"I admit it."

"Take a dozen sure men, if necessary."

"I understand, of course, that your majesty will permit me to do the best I can for myself, and I am grateful to you for this; but where shall I arrest the King of Navarre?"

"Where would it best please you to arrest him?"

"In some place in which I should be warranted in doing so, if possible, even by his Majesty."

"Yes, I understand, in some royal palace; what do you say to the Louvre, for instance?"

"Oh, if your majesty would permit it, that would be a great favor."

"You will arrest him, then, in the Louvre."

"In what part?"

"In his own room."

Maurevel bowed.

"When, madame?"

"This evening, or rather to-night."

"Very well, madame. Now, will your majesty deign to inform me on one point?"

"On what point?"

"About the respect due to his position."

"Respect! position!" said Catharine, "why, then, you do not know, monsieur, that the King of France owes respect to no one in his kingdom, whoever he may be, recognizing no position as equal to his own?"

Maurevel bowed a second time.

"I insist on this point, however, madame, if your majesty will allow me."

"I will, monsieur."

"If the king contests the authenticity of the order, which is not probable, but" —

"On the contrary, monsieur, he is sure to do so."

"He will contest it?"

"Without a doubt."

"And consequently he will refuse to obey it?"

"I fear so."

"And he will resist?"

"Probably."

"Ah! the devil!" said Maurevel; "and in that case" —

"In what case?" said Catharine, not moving her eyes from him.

"Why, in case he resists, what is to be done?"

"What do you do when you are given an order from the King, that is, when you represent the King, and when there is any resistance, Monsieur de Maurevel?"

"Why, madame," said the sbirro, "when I am honored with such an order, and when this order refers to a simple gentleman, I kill him."

"I told you, monsieur," said Catharine, "and I scarcely think that sufficient time has elapsed for you to have forgotten it, that the King of France recognizes no position in his kingdom, and that after him the greatest are simple gentlemen."

Maurevel grew pale, for he was beginning to comprehend.

"Oh! oh!" he cried, "kill the King of Navarre?"

"Why, who is speaking of killing him? Where is the order to kill him? The King wishes him taken to the Bastille, and the order contains nothing more. If he lets himself be arrested, very good; but as he will not let himself be arrested, as he will resist, as he will endeavor to kill you" —

Maurevel grew paler.

"You will defend yourself," continued Catharine. "One cannot ask a brave man like you to let himself be killed without defending himself; and in defending yourself, what can

you expect? You must let come what may. You understand me, do you not?"

"Yes, madame; and yet" —

"Come, do you want me to write *dead or alive* after the words *order to arrest?*"

"I confess, madame, that that would do away with my scruples."

"Well, it must be done, of course, since you do not think the order can be carried out without it."

And Catharine shrugged her shoulders, unrolled the parchment with one hand, and wrote with the other: "*dead or alive.*"

"Now," said she, "do you consider the order all right?"

"Yes, madame," replied Maurevel; "but I beg your majesty to leave the carrying out of the entire affair to me."

"What have I said that will interfere with it?"

"Your majesty told me to take a dozen men."

"Yes, to make sure" —

"Well, I ask permission to take only six."

"Why so?"

"Because, madame, if anything happens to the prince, as it probably will, it would be easy to excuse six men for having been afraid of losing the prisoner, but no one would excuse a dozen guards for not having let half of their number be killed before laying hands on royalty."

"Fine royalty, in truth, which has no kingdom."

"Madame," said Maurevel, "it is not the kingdom which makes the king: it is birth."

"Very well," said Catharine; "do as you please. Only I must warn you that I do not wish you to leave the Louvre."

"But, madame, to get my men together?"

"Have you not a sort of sergeant whom you can charge with this duty?"

"I have my lackey, who not only is a faithful fellow, but who has even occasionally aided me in this sort of thing."

"Send for him, and confer with him. You know the chamber hung with the King's arms, do you not? Well, your breakfast shall be served there; and from there you shall give your orders. The place will aid you to collect your wits in case they are scattered. Then when my son returns from the hunt, you are to go into my oratory, and wait until the time comes."

"But how are we to get into the room? Probably the king suspects something, and he will shut himself up in it."

"I have a duplicate key to every door," said Catharine, "and the bolts have been removed from Henry's room. Adieu, Monsieur de Maurevel, for a while. I will have you taken to the King's armory. Ah! by the way! remember that the order of a King must be carried out before anything else. No excuse is admissible; a defeat, even a failure, would compromise the honor of the King. It is a serious matter."

And Catharine, without giving Maurevel time to answer, called Monsieur de Nancey, the captain of the guards, and ordered him to conduct Maurevel to the king's armory.

"My God!" exclaimed Maurevel as he followed his guide, "I have risen to the hierarchy of assassination; from a simple gentleman to a captain, from a captain to an admiral, from an admiral to a king without a crown. Who knows if I shall not some day be a king with a crown!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE HUNT.

The outrider who had turned aside the boar and who had told the King that the animal had not left the place was not mistaken. Scarcely were the bloodhounds put on the trail before it plunged into the thickets, and from a cluster of thorn bushes drove out the boar which the outrider had recognized by its track. It was a recluse; that is, the strangest kind of animal.

It started straight ahead and crossed the road fifty feet from the King, followed only by the bloodhound which had driven it back. The first relay of dogs was at once let loose, twenty in number, which sprang after it.

Hunting was Charles' chief passion. Scarcely had the animal crossed the road before he started after it, followed by the Duc d'Alençon and Henry, to whom a sign had indicated that he must not leave Charles.

The rest of the hunters followed the King.

At the time of which we are writing, the royal forests were far from being what they are to-day, great parks intersected by carriage roads. Then traffic was almost wanting. Kings had not yet conceived the idea of being merchants, and

of dividing their woods into fellings, copses, and forests. The trees, planted, not by learned foresters, but by the hand of God, who threw the grain to the will of the winds, were not arranged in quincunxes, but grew as they pleased, as they do to-day in any virginal forest of America. In short, a forest in those days was a den of the wild boar, the stag, the wolf, and robbers; and a dozen paths starting from one point starred that of Bondy, surrounded by a circular road as the circle of a wheel surrounds its fellies.

To carry the comparison further, the nave would not be a bad representation of the single point where the parties meet in the centre of the wood, where the wandering hunters rally to start out again towards the point where the lost animal again appears.

At the end of a quarter of an hour there happened what always happens in such cases. Insurmountable obstacles rose in the path of the hunters, the cries of the dogs were lost in the distance, and the King returned to the meeting-place cursing and swearing as was his habit.

"Well, D'Alençon! Well, Henriot!" said he, "there you are, by Heaven, as calm and unruffled as nuns following their abbess. That is not hunting. Why, D'Alençon, you look as though you had just stepped out of a band-box, and you are so saturated with perfumery that if you were to pass between the boar and my dogs, you might put them off the scent And you, Henry, where is your spear, your musket? Let us see!"

"Sire," said Henry, "of what use is a musket? I know that your Majesty likes to shoot the beast when the dogs have caught it. As to a spear, I am clumsy enough with this weapon, which is not much used among our mountains, where we hunt the bear with a simple dagger."

"By Heavens, Henry, when you return to your Pyrenees you will have to send me a whole cartload of bears. It must be a pretty hunt that is carried on at such close quarters with an animal which might strangle us. Listen, I think I hear the dogs. No, I am mistaken." The King took his horn and blew a blast; several horns answered him. Suddenly an outrider appeared who blew another blast.

"The boar! the boar!" cried the King.

He galloped off, followed by the rest of the hunters who had rallied round him.

The outrider was not mistaken. As the King advanced they

began to hear the barking of the pack, which consisted of more than sixty dogs, for one after another they had let loose all the relays placed at the points the boar had already passed. The King saw the boar again, and taking advantage of a clump of high trees, he rushed after him, blowing his horn with all his might.

For some time the princes followed him. But the King had such a strong horse and was so carried away by his ardor, and he rode over such rough roads and through such thick underbrush, that at first the ladies, then the Duc de Guise and his gentlemen, and finally the two princes, were forced to abandon him. Tavannes held out for a time longer, but at length he too gave up.

Except Charles and a few outriders who, excited over a promised reward, would not leave the King, everyone had gathered about the open space in the centre of the wood. The two princes were together on a narrow path, the Duc de Guise and his gentlemen had halted a hundred feet from them. Further on were the ladies.

"Does it not really seem," said the Duc d'Alençon to Henry, indicating by a wink the Duc de Guise, "that that man with his escort sheathed in steel is the real king? Poor princes that we are, he does not even honor us by a glance."

"Why should he treat us better than we treat our own relatives?" replied Henry. "Why, brother, are not you and I prisoners at the court of France, hostages from our party?"

Duc François started at these words, and looked at Henry as if to provoke further explanation; but Henry had said more than he usually did and was silent.

"What do you mean, Henry?" asked the Duc François, visibly annoyed that his brother-in-law by stopping had left him to open the conversation.

"I say, brother," said Henry, "that all these men who are so well armed, whose duty seems to be not to lose sight of us, look exactly like guards preventing two people from running away."

"Running away? why? how?" asked D'Alençon, admirably successful in his pretended surprise and innocence.

"You have a magnificent mount, François," said Henry, following out his thoughts, while apparently changing the conversation. "I am sure he could make seven leagues in an hour, and twenty between now and noon. It is a fine day.

And one feels like saying good-by. See the beautiful cross-road. Does it not tempt you, François? As to me, my spurs burn me."

François did not reply. But he first turned red and then white. Then he bent his head, as if listening for sounds from the hunters.

"The news from Poland is having its effect," said Henry, "and my dear brother-in-law has his plans. He would like me to escape, but I shall not do so by myself."

Scarcely had this thought passed through his mind before several new converts, who had come to court during the past two or three months, galloped up and smiled pleasantly on the two princes. The Duc d'Alençon, provoked by Henry's remarks, had but one word to say, one gesture to make, and it was evident that thirty or forty horsemen, who at that moment gathered around them as though to oppose the troop belonging to Monsieur de Guise, favored his flight; but he turned aside his head, and, raising his horn to his lips, he sounded the rally. But the newcomers, as if they thought that the hesitation on the part of the Duc d'Alençon was due to the presence of the followers of the De Guises, had by degrees glided among them and the two princes, and had drawn themselves up in echelons with a strategic skill which showed the usual military disposition. In fact, to reach the Duc d'Alençon and the King of Navarre it would have been necessary to pass through this company, while, as far as eye could reach, a perfectly free road stretched out before the brothers.

Suddenly from among the trees, ten feet from the King of Navarre, another gentleman appeared, as yet unperceived by the two princes. Henry was trying to think who he was, when the gentleman raised his hat and Henry recognized him as the Vicomte de Turenne, one of the leaders of the Protestant party, who was supposed to be in Poitou.

The vicomte even ventured to make a sign which clearly meant,

"Will you come?"

But having consulted the impassable face and dull eye of the Duc d'Alençon, Henry turned his head two or three times over his shoulder as if something was the matter with his neck or doublet.

This was a refusal. The vicomte understood it, put both spurs to his horse and disappeared in the thicket. At that

moment the pack was heard approaching, then they saw the boar followed by the dogs cross the end of the path where they were all gathered; then Charles IX., like an infernal hunter, hatless, the horn at his mouth blowing enough to burst his lungs; three or four outriders followed. Tavannes had disappeared.

"The King!" cried the Duc d'Alençon, and he rode after him.

Reassured by the presence of his good friends, Henry signed to them not to leave, and advanced towards the ladies.

"Well!" said Marguerite, taking a few steps towards him.

"Well, madame," said Henry, "we are hunting the wild boar."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, the wind has changed since morning; but I believe you predicted this."

"These changes of the wind are bad for hunting, are they not, monsieur?" asked Marguerite.

"Yes," said Henry; "they sometimes upset all plans, which have to be made over again." Just then the barking of the dogs began to be heard as they rapidly approached, and a sort of noisy dust warned the hunters to be on their guard. Each one raised his head and listened.

Almost immediately the boar appeared again, but instead of returning to the woods, he followed the road that led directly to the open space where were the ladies, the gentlemen paying court to them, and the hunters who had given up the chase.

Behind the animal came thirty or forty great dogs, panting; then, twenty feet behind them, King Charles without hat or cloak, his clothes torn by the thorns, his face and hands covered with blood.

One or two outriders were with him.

The King stopped blowing his horn only to urge on his dogs, and stopped urging on his dogs only to return to his horn. He saw no one. Had his horse stumbled, he might have cried out as did Richard III.: "My kingdom for a horse!" But the horse seemed as eager as his master. His feet did not touch the ground, and his nostrils breathed forth fire. Boar, dogs, and King passed like a dream.

"Halloo! halloo!" cried the King as he went by, raising the horn to his bloody lips.

A few feet behind him came the Duc d'Alençon and two

outriders. But the horses of the others had given out or else they were lost.

Everyone started after the King, for it was evident that the boar would soon be taken.

In fact, at the end of about ten minutes the animal left the path it had been following, and sprang into the bushes; but reaching an open space, it ran to a rock and faced the dogs.

At the shouts from Charles, who had followed it, everyone drew near.

They arrived at an interesting point in the chase. The boar seemed determined to make a desperate defence. The dogs, excited by a run of more than three hours, rushed on it with a fury which increased the shouts and the oaths of the King.

All the hunters formed a circle, the King somewhat in advance, behind him the Duc d'Alençon armed with a musket, and Henry, who had nothing but his simple hunting knife.

The Duc d'Alençon unfastened his musket and lighted the match. Henry moved his knife in its sheath.

As to the Duc de Guise, disdainful of all the details of hunting, he stood somewhat apart from the others with his gentlemen. The women, gathered together in a group, formed a counterpart to that of the duke.

Everyone who was anything of a hunter stood with eyes fixed on the animal in anxious expectation.

To one side an outrider was endeavoring to restrain the King's two mastiffs, which, encased in their coats of mail, were waiting to take the boar by the ears, howling and jumping about in such a manner that every instant one might think they would burst their chains.

The boar made a wonderful resistance. Attacked at once by forty or more dogs, which enveloped it like a roaring tide, which covered it by their motley carpet, which on all sides was striving to reach its skin, wrinkled with bristles, at each blow of its snout it hurled a dog ten feet in the air. The dogs fell back, torn to pieces, and, with entrails dragging, at once returned to the fray. Charles, with hair on end, bloodshot eyes, and inflated nostrils, leaned over the neck of his dripping horse shouting furious "halloos!"

In less than ten minutes twenty dogs were out of the fight.

"The mastiffs!" cried Charles; "the mastiffs!"

At this shout the outrider opened the carbine-swivels of the

leashes, and the two bloodhounds rushed into the midst of the carnage, overturning everything, scattering everything, making a way with their coats of mail to the animal, which they seized by the ear.

The boar, knowing that it was caught, clinched its teeth both from rage and pain.

"Bravo, Duredent! Bravo, Risquetout!" cried Charles. "Courage, dogs! A spear! a spear!"

"Do you not want my musket?" said the Duc d'Alençon.

"No," cried the King, "no; one cannot feel a bullet when he shoots; there is no fun in it; but one can feel a spear. A spear! a spear!"

They handed the King a hunting spear hardened by fire and armed with a steel point.

"Take care, brother!" cried Marguerite.

"Come! come!" cried the Duchesse de Nevers. "Do not miss, sire. Give the beast a good stab!"

"Be easy, duchess!" said Charles.

Couching his lance, he darted at the boar which, held by the two bloodhounds, could not escape the blow. But at sight of the shining lance it turned to one side, and the weapon, instead of sinking into its breast, glided over its shoulder and blunted itself against the rock to which the animal had run.

"A thousand devils!" cried the King. "I have missed him. A spear! a spear!"

And bending back, as horsemen do when they are going to take a fence, he hurled his useless lance from him.

An outrider advanced and offered him another.

But at that moment, as though it foresaw the fate which awaited it, and which it wished to resist, by a violent effort the boar snatched its torn ears from the teeth of the bloodhounds, and with eyes bloody, protruding, hideous, its breath burning like the heat from a furnace, with chattering teeth and lowered head it sprang at the King's horse. Charles was too good a hunter not to have foreseen this. He turned his horse, which began to rear, but he had miscalculated the pressure, and the horse, too tightly reined in, or perhaps giving way to his fright, fell over backwards. The spectators gave a terrible cry: the horse had fallen, and the King's leg was under him.

"Your hand, sire, give me your hand," said Henry.

The King let go his horse's bridle, seized the saddle with his left hand, and tried to draw out his hunting knife with his

right; but the knife, pressed into his belt by the weight of his body, would not come from its sheath.

"The boar! the boar!" cried Charles; "it is on me, D'Alençon! on me!"

The horse, recovering himself as if he understood his master's danger, stretched his muscles, and had already succeeded in getting up on its three legs, when, at the cry from his brother, Henry saw the Duc François grow frightfully pale and raise the musket to his shoulder, but, instead of striking the boar, which was but two feet from the King, the ball broke the knee of the horse, which fell down again, his nose touching the ground. At that instant the boar, with its snout, tore Charles's boot.

"Oh!" murmured D'Alençon with ashy lips, "I suppose that the Duc d'Anjou is King of France, and that I am King of Poland."

The boar was about to attack Charles's leg, when suddenly the latter felt someone raise his arm; then he saw the flash of a sharp-pointed blade which was driven into the shoulder of the boar and disappeared up to its guard, while a hand gloved in steel turned aside the head already poked under his clothes.

As the horse had risen, Charles had succeeded in freeing his leg, and now raising himself heavily, he saw that he was dripping with blood, whereupon he became as pale as a corpse.

"Sire," said Henry, who still knelt holding the boar pierced to the heart, "sire, it is nothing, I turned aside the teeth, and your Majesty is not hurt."

Then he rose, let go the knife, and the boar fell back pouring forth more blood from its mouth than from its wound.

Charles, surrounded by a breathless crowd, assailed by cries of terror which would have dashed the greatest courage, was for a moment ready to fall on the dying animal. But he recovered himself and, turning toward the King of Navarre, he pressed his hand with a look in which shone the first spark of feeling that had been roused in his heart for twenty-four years.

"Thank you, Henriot!" said he.

"My poor brother!" cried D'Alençon, approaching Charles.

"Ah! it is you, D'Alençon, is it?" said the King. "Well, famous marksman that you are, what became of your ball?"

"It must have flattened itself against the boar," said the duke.

"Well! my God!" exclaimed Henry, with admirably assumed surprise; "you see, François, your bullet has broken the leg of his Majesty's horse. That is strange!"

"What!" said the King; "is that true?"

"It is possible," said the duke terrified; "my hand shook so!"

"The fact is that for a clever marksman that was a strange thing to do, François!" said Charles frowning. "A second time, Henriot, I thank you!"

"Gentlemen," continued the King, "let us return to Paris; I have had enough of this."

Marguerite came up to congratulate Henry.

"Yes, indeed, Margot," said Charles, "congratulate him, and sincerely too, for without him the King of France would be Henry III."

"Alas, madame," said the Béarnais, "Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou, who is already my enemy, will be angrier than ever at me. But what can you expect? One does what one can. Ask Monsieur d'Alençon."

And bowing, he drew his knife from the wild boar's body and dug it two or three times into the earth to wipe off the blood.